

The history of communication studies across the Americas: A view from the United States

A história dos estudos de comunicação nas Américas: uma visão dos Estados Unidos

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ABSTRACT

This essay reflects on the potential for scholarship that sensitively treats the histories of media and communication research across the Americas. Writing from the contexts of U.S. communication studies, we begin by reflexively considering some of the bases of U.S. hegemony within the history and historiography of the field. We suggest the importance of work that provincializes and decenters the U.S. and also traces transnational flows and cross-regional dynamics that have constituted communication studies in all its versions across the Americas. We then illustrate what a transnational history of U.S.-Latin American entanglements might resemble, offering a provisional periodization from the early twentieth century to the present.

Keywords: Transnational history of communication research, the Americas, geopolitics, knowledge dynamics

RESUMO

Este ensaio reflete sobre o potencial de estudos que tratem com sensibilidade as histórias da pesquisa em mídia e comunicação nas Américas. Iniciando a escrita a partir dos contextos dos estudos de comunicação dos EUA, refletimos sobre algumas das bases da hegemonia norte-americana na história e historiografia desse campo. Destacamos a importância do trabalho que, por um lado, descentraliza e

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coloca em perspectiva os EUA e, por outro, mapeia os fluxos transnacionais e as dinâmicas inter-regionais que moldaram os estudos de comunicação em todas as suas variações nas Américas. Em seguida, exemplificamos como poderia ser uma história transnacional das relações entre EUA e América Latina, fornecendo uma periodização preliminar desde o início do século XX até os dias atuais.

Palavras-chave: história transnacional da pesquisa em comunicação, Américas, geopolítica, dinâmica do conhecimento

WILLIAM F. EADIE'S (2022) recent book, *When Communication Became a Discipline*, tracks the emergence of U.S. communication research. Eadie, however, never specifies the geographic scope of his history: the object of the book is *the* discipline of communication. It is easy enough to pick up that he is writing about the U.S. and nowhere else—that the “we” the book addresses is fellow U.S. scholars. Still, there is something jarring about the definite article (“*the* discipline”) in a study that so relentlessly localizes its coverage. The project’s stated scope is universal, but the history itself is provincial.

When Communication Became a Discipline is, of course, no outlier. It is merely the most recent affirmation of a patterned framing unique to writing on the history of U.S. media and communication studies. That historiography has been built on systemic erasures of other traditions around the world, as well as internal erasures of the contributions made by women, members of minoritized groups, and lower-prestige institutions in the U.S. Those erasures are in turn reflections of much broader ideological and geopolitical dynamics that have favored well-placed white men in the United States, confident in their rights to benefit from the labor of Others within the hegemonic orders of unearned privilege they were born into.

The limitations of these unmarked, U.S.-centric stories are well known to those in other areas of the world, particularly in Latin America. Not only do they erase the robust traditions of communication studies in the region but they are also part of a too-familiar geopolitical pattern of U.S. attempts to control the region while remaining blithely unaware of the cultures and peoples who live in it. As authors, we are attentive to these patterns, even as we are concerned about unintentionally reproducing them in our own work.

In this essay, we propose to repurpose the definite article of Eadie’s book. *The* urgent task for historians of U.S. communication studies is to provincialize and particularize the field as it has developed in that country and situate it within international movements of ideas, institutions, and people that have

constituted the field globally. We believe that working with a pan-American frame is a particularly promising piece of that broader project, one that allows us to investigate South-North entanglements within the hemisphere. That is a large, multi-dimensional project that calls for new international collaborations. We need much more careful primary research, as well as efforts to connect pieces of the story that exist in the current literature. The aim is not some kind of new master narrative but rather a pluralistic collection of stories that reflect both South-North entanglements and the particularities of the different locations that each of us inhabits. With this essay, we hope to contribute to that larger effort.

Writing from the contexts of U.S. communication studies, we begin by reflexively considering some of the bases of U.S. hegemony within the history and historiography of the field. That sort of reflection, which Latin American critical scholars have been doing since the late 1960s, is an essential part of the project, which in full form would call for a historical sociology of knowledge analyzing the dynamics that produced the unmarked universalism that has characterized the field and its histories in our country. The project would also call for intensive investigation of lines of exclusion around race, gender/sexuality, indigeneity, language, and geopolitical location that have marked the field in all of its national manifestations, most certainly including the U.S. A recently published special section of the journal we edit, *History of Media Studies*, is part of our efforts to do this sort of critical reflective work (Simonson et al., 2022a, 2022b). The first section of this essay is an extension of that project.

The second broad task is reconstructive: writing new histories that, on the one hand, provincialize and decenter the U.S. and, on the other, trace transnational flows and cross-regional dynamics that have constituted communication studies in all its versions across the Americas. We return to the need for new collaborations, which are represented in this issue of **MATRIZes** and in the parallel special sections in *Comunicación y Sociedad* (Mexico) and *History of Media Studies* (the U.S.). Our contribution to that effort involves exploring what a history of communication studies might look like if it focused on transnational entanglements between the U.S. and Latin America. That project carries risks associated with the long history of U.S. imperialism beyond our southern border. We acknowledge and try to address them directly while doing two kinds of reconstructive work: 1. offering a heuristic for investigating the transnational forces that have produced the field over time and 2. using it to sketch three historical eras of Latin American-U.S. entanglement from the early twentieth century to



the present. Our accounts of those three eras cannot be exhaustive but we hope they are illustrative of the potential of a transnational frame across the Americas.

U.S. HEGEMONY FROM WITHIN

For more than one hundred years, the U.S. literature has rested on an audacious conflation of the national tradition with that of the world. As a matter of unquestioned routine, books and articles on U.S.-specific developments were cast as the history of media and communication studies¹. Even critics of triumphalist accounts, such as William Eadie's, have tended to leave their counter-stories unmarked².

The U.S. historiography's masked particularity is a reflection, more or less, of the same thought-style in the U.S. field itself—at least since the World War II era—embrace of the “communication research” label and the subsequent (and multi-stranded) institutionalization of the field. As the published historiography unwittingly documents, U.S. communication scholars have tended to describe their findings in universal terms and to treat their fellow U.S. colleagues as their only significant peers.

A more speculative point (one that can be neither drawn out nor defended here) is that the arrogant universalism of the U.S. discipline was itself conditioned by the hegemony of the postwar United States. In a striking echo of the U.S. share of the global economy at the time, *more than half* of the world's social scientists were based in the U.S. in the early postwar period. As discussed briefly below, an elite cadre of U.S. communication researchers—most of whom identified with mainline social science disciplines—helped form a forward position in the early Cold War. Historians of social science have repeatedly stressed the postwar blend of collective self-confidence, professed objectivity, and international evangelism that characterized U.S. social scientists in this period, especially self-identified members of the *behavioral sciences* vanguard (Heyck, 2015). The point is that the geopolitical position of the country as an unrivaled “free world” hegemon was reflected in its enormous and well-funded university system. The penchant of U.S. scholars—within communication and beyond—to universalize their particulars was, in this period at least, underwritten by Pax Americana.

Seen in this light, the embrace of the definite article by historians of U.S. communication research is a kind of double echo—of the affluent hubris of the field, itself predicated on that of the country. This reading helps to explain, at least, the peculiar global imaginary at play in much of the published

¹ Jesse Delia's (1987) influential account, published in *The Handbook of Communication Science* and among the first to lay synoptic claim to the whole “communication” field, illustrates the point: a universal title with a near-exclusive focus on the particular U.S. case. Likewise for Everett Rogers's (1994) widely cited book-length account.

² Todd Gitlin (1978), for example, gave his critique of mid-century media sociology at the Bureau of Applied Social Research an unmodified, geography-free title: “Media Sociology: The Dominant Paradigm.” Likewise with Christopher Simpson's (1994) exposé of U.S. Cold War communication research.

literature, which mixes indifference with imperialism. The indifference is more straightforward: the U.S. case is treated as a center with no periphery. It is far simpler to conflate the nation with the world if there is no world to speak of. Our view, though, is that this insularity, almost willful in character, is predicated on and continues to be sustained by the implied overspread of the U.S. model. There is an unstated presumption in the historiography, in other words, that all the significant developments occurred in the United States, so much so that the international story is one of emanation. In one strand of the literature, that means the travels and adventures of Wilbur Schramm (e.g., McAnany, 2012). Either way, the unarticulated belief is that the action that mattered—the bits worth writing down—happened in the U.S. first, then diffused around the world. If we are right, this shared imaginary has licensed a lack of interest in, and outright ignorance of, the rest of the world—including Latin America.

U.S.-LATIN AMERICA ENTANGLEMENTS: TOWARD A HISTORY

As Maria Löblich and Stefanie Averbeck-Lietz (2016) write, “transnational connections have been a part of Communication Studies since its beginnings” (p. 25). Those connections have often been made invisible by the national frames within which much of the history of the field has been written—some but not all of which is connected with postwar U.S. hegemony. The result has been an unbalanced pattern of recognizing South-North entanglements in the Americas. Latin America is nearly invisible in the U.S.-focused literature, as ignominiously reflected in the “American” shorthand for the United States³. Outside the field of development communication, it has been rare for historical accounts of the field in the U.S. to acknowledge the significance of engagements with Latin America or to discuss traditions across the regions comparatively. U.S. approaches, by contrast, loom large in the growing English-language scholarship on the history of Latin American communication research, often tracked as an explicit foil in the development of homegrown alternatives.

Here we ask what would be required to write a fuller history of the entanglements of U.S. and Latin American communication studies. We raise that question cognizant of the troubled colonial origins of the term “Latin America,” its connections to a southward facing version of U.S. imperialism, and the heterogeneity of a vast region with more than 600 million people and 20 modern countries (Fuentes-Navarro, 2016, p. 338). We proceed in this direction in part because the label “Latin America/América Latina”

³ Of course even “the United States” is a linguistic land grab given the official names of México and Brasil. Nevertheless we have, for want of a good alternative, invoked “United States” and “U.S.” as shorthands in this paper.



has done important work in transnational discourses of communication research since at least the 1930s, deployed by outsiders and insiders alike. We take the connections of the region to U.S. imperialism to be a crucial historical conjuncture that needs to be surfaced further—particularly for those working in the U.S. And we understand coloniality to be a condition of communication studies across the Americas which, while not the main focus of our essay, is in need of concerted critical scrutiny of the sort Erick Torrico (2016a, 2018) and other Latin American scholars have been giving it over the last decade.

Drawing upon sociological approaches to the history of communication studies (e.g., Fuentes-Navarro, 1998; Löblich & Scheu, 2011) and programmatic statements toward a transnational history of the social sciences (esp. Heilbron et al., 2008), we suggest the heuristic of *ideas, institutions, people, and socio-political contexts* as a productive overarching framework for investigating the history of the field across the Americas. We mean each of the four broadly. *Ideas* traverse the socio-cognitive intellectual domain of theories, paradigms, concepts, and methods, as well as the socio-material array of published books, articles, technologies of investigation, pedagogical practices, organized initiatives (*applied research*), and the embodied use, reception, and translation of them as they cross borders and take form in particular contexts. *Institutions* range from governmental agencies, international organizations, and private foundations to professional associations, universities, departments, publishing houses, journals, and the invisible colleges they structure. *People*, in turn, refer to the scholars, students, support personnel, and other actors who help produce ideas and institutions and are in part produced through them. *Socio-political contexts*, finally, encompass all the ways that broader societal dynamics have shaped the field of communication studies—e.g., dominant and counter-hegemonic ideologies, hierarchies of power and privilege, geopolitical dramas of nation-states and their allies, social and cultural movements, and structures of feeling that shape particular historical moments. The four overarching categories are, of course, interrelated, as are the phenomena suggested by each of them, a reflection of the tangled complexities of academic fields as historical phenomena.

Thinking in a specifically *transnational* way about the nexus of U.S. and Latin American communication research means conceiving of various contact zones, in which ideas, institutions, and people from different nations engage with one another in consequential ways. While these contact zones may be geographically located within one nation, they are shaped by sociopolitical contexts that transcend that location. Among the phenomena of interest

within a transnational frame are texts that circulate across borders, graduate students pursuing degrees in foreign countries, international gatherings and professional associations, cross-border initiatives supported by governments and private foundations, multinational publishers and ranking systems, and local intellectual thought-styles that take shape in relation to perceived alternatives associated with other regions. One of the challenges is to take up a truly communicative understanding of these multifarious phenomena and contact zones, one that recognizes the dynamism of encounter and the multiple forms that can take.

If the four-fold heuristic might guide inquiry in one way, then a broad periodization can add a second organizing axis. Latin American scholars have offered several historical periodizations for the field within the region (e.g., Marques de Melo, 2011b; Torrico, 2016b). A transnational frame may overlap with them but it also looks for the significant eras of South-North entanglement. As a starting point for further inquiry, we suggest three eras. 1. A long early period, running from the first decades of the twentieth century through the mid-1960s, which was initially based on exchanges around journalism education and research before encompassing mass communication and public opinion research from the 1930s forward (our main attention in this essay). In this period, shaped by World War II and U.S. efforts to exert hegemony during the Cold War, communication research was institutionalized—first in the United States and then, in embryonic form, in Latin America. 2. A dynamic middle period, spanning from the late 1960s to the early 1990s, marked sociopolitically by New Lefts across both regions, pitched battles about paradigms and methods, the increased movement of people and contacts across borders, and meaningful intellectual exchanges mediated through English-language scholarship. This period witnesses a deeper but still incomplete institutionalization of the field in Latin America and its rapid expansion and pluralization in the United States. 3. A still-unfolding recent period running from the mid-1990s to the present and characterized by accelerated processes of globalization, neoliberalism, sub-disciplinary specialization, U.S.-inflected versions of professionalism, and, in the past two decades, expanded critical consciousness about neo-colonial forms of domination in world knowledge systems. This period also sees a full, widespread institutionalization of communication studies across Latin America organized through an extensive Spanish- and Portuguese-language scholarly system that faces challenges from new forces of English-language domination.



⁴ On the U.S. case, see Carey (1979) and Folkerts (2014); and for Latin American countries, Nixon (1982), Moreira & Lago (2017), and Islas & Arribas (2010, pp. 4-5).

⁵ See, for example, Daros & Rüdiger (2022) on the muted Brazilian reception of U.S. journalism and journalism education models from the 1940s through the early 1960s. Gómez-Palacio (1989, p. 41) reports, however, that the first journalism school in the region, in Argentina, was founded with help from the Columbia Journalism School.

⁶ The Rockefeller Foundation had already assembled many of the figures who would, from 1940 on, occupy the new forward position of the field in the war effort by the mid-1930s with the aim to use new polling methods to boost educational radio. With the outbreak of war in Europe, the foundation in effect repurposed its network and infrastructure to serve the Allied propaganda cause before the formal U.S. entry into the war. See Gary (1996), Buxton (1994), and—for a Latin America-centered Rockefeller radio project in the late 1930s—Cramer (2009).

⁷ As José Luis Ortiz Garza and others have shown, the Cantril operation left behind a significant, if checked, history in México. See Ortiz Garza (2007); Moreno & Sánchez-Castro (2009); and, for the Brazilian case, Tota (2009, pp. 23-57); and Vassallo de Lopes & Romancini (2016, p. 351).

⁸ Cantril (1967, p. 2) noted that the study, “of course, could not include any direct questions and utilized entirely what technicians call open-ended questions, questions worded indirectly in such a way that very few people would refuse to answer them.”

Parallels and incursions: Early Twentieth Century through the Mid-1960s

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the study of media and communication was scattered and un-disciplined. This was as true for the United States as for Latin American countries. In both places, a decade or two earlier in the U.S., journalism was introduced to the university, though unevenly, through courses, professorships, or (in fewer cases) standalone schools devoted to training reporters. Up and down the hemisphere the pattern seems to have been similar: a sprinkling of university-based initiatives, slowly accreting and serviced by a thin overlay of studies on press history, law, and ethics⁴. Journalism education and scholarship developed in rough parallel in the U.S. and Latin America, with few prominent lines of engagement or cross-continental influence registered in the secondary literature⁵.

That would soon change. Communication research, so-named, was established in the U.S. first in the lead up to World War II. The sociologists, political scientists, and social psychologists who started calling themselves “communication researchers” were initially brought together by the Rockefeller Foundation⁶. Tellingly, one of the very first deployments of the newly named field was to Latin America in the form of a vast and clandestine polling operation under the auspices of Nelson Rockefeller’s Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. Partly funded by the family’s foundation and led by psychologist Hadley Cantril—Nelson’s former Ivy League roommate—the secret, region-wide campaign was used to guide policy and propaganda to secure Latin Americans’ loyalty to the Allied cause (Cramer & Prutsch, 2006; Navarro & Ortiz Garza, 2020; Ortiz Garza, 2012). At its moment of birth, then, the U.S. field served as a mid-twentieth century extension of the Monroe Doctrine. Communication research was, in this signal moment, knowledge *about* Latin America *for* U.S. elites, extracted under false pretenses⁷.

That one-way, top-down deployment of U.S. communication research to Latin America was reprised, at moments that remain under-developed in the literature, in the early decades of the Cold War. One example will have to stand in for the others, a fitting one: Hadley Cantril, this time with private Nelson Rockefeller funds, used the same secretive approach to gauge Cuban opinion in the tense aftermath of the 1959 revolution. In 1960, Cantril’s research shop conducted a clandestine survey on the island, whose real purpose was buried by innocuous-seeming questions, with the explicit aim—as in 1940—to inform White House policy (Cantril, 1967, pp. 1-5)⁸. The point to emphasize is that postwar U.S. communication research co-evolved with the Cold War national security state—an alliance that, to a large extent, revolved around a shared campaign to secure “Third

World” hearts-and-minds, in Latin America and around the non-aligned globe (Pooley, 2008).

Still, it is important to place the cloak-and-dagger pattern—the “psychological warfare” of U.S. communication research targeting Latin America—in broader relief. Without denying the constitutive significance of the Cold War, it is possible to add an overlapping but more complicated narrative—one that was arguably more important to the postwar relationship between U.S. and Latin American communication research. Here we refer to the *overt* attempt to export the U.S. model to Latin America, most notably with the 1959 establishment of the Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Periodismo para América Latina (CIESPAL).

To briefly reprise this second story—the front-stage counterpart to the backstage skullduggery—we return to World War II, when newly christened U.S. communication researchers came to populate an array of federal agencies centered on propaganda and morale. One of those figures, the literature scholar Wilbur Schramm, saw an opportunity. During and after the war he enlisted research-friendly faculty at a handful of prominent journalism schools with the self-conscious aim to institutionalize, as a doctorate-granting discipline, what had been an interdisciplinary crossroads. By the mid-1950s Schramm’s march through the journalism schools was well underway. The new intellectual coordinates of the discipline were, crucially, aligned with the broader behavioral sciences movement, underwritten by the big foundation and national security agencies. Like other behavioral scientists, communication scholars in the Schramm mold were *for* science and *against* socialism. In the mid- to late 1950s, they jointly produced a new, activist literature on “modernization,” predicated on the conviction that economic growth and communications infrastructure would inoculate the “Third World”—Latin America very much included—against the Soviet scourge (Gilman, 2003; Latham, 2000). In Schramm’s influential framing, communication research was part of this project as well. As he said at a UNESCO gathering in Santiago, Chile, in 1961, “just as mass media development is an essential part of economic development, so is mass communication research essential for the swiftest and most efficient development of the mass media” (Schramm, 1960, p. 7).

This modernization literature was an important backdrop to the 1959 founding of CIESPAL, in Ecuador⁹. Though established by UNESCO, in its initial years the center was also funded by the Organization of American States and the Ford Foundation. CIESPAL’s mission, and to some extent its operation, centered on journalism—hence the *Periodismo* in its name and in keeping with UNESCO’s mid- to late-1950s journalism initiative of which it was a part.

⁹There is a large literature on CIESPAL and the Latin American field. See Daros (2023); Feliciano (1988); Marques de Melo (2011a); Meditsch (2021); Aragão (2017); and Ruiz (2010).



CIESPAL was predicated on the same productive slippage from journalism to communication that had characterized the U.S. discipline for over a decade. This was no surprise: for its inaugural half-decade, the center was something like a U.S. outpost. Its publishing program was largely devoted to translations of U.S. “classics”; most of its rotating faculty hailed from the U.S.; and its curriculum was unambiguously set in the behavioral sciences key (Daros, 2023, pp. 109-111; Day, 1966; Gómez-Palacio, 1989, pp. 26–29, p. 164; Marques de Melo, 1988, p. 409; Meditsch, 2021, p. 128). European scholars and approaches were important too, even in CIESPAL’s early years, but they were plainly secondary to the U.S. model (Marques de Melo, 1983a, pp. 182-183).

It was in this early 1960s period, after the 1959 Cuban revolution re-oriented the attention of Washington southward, that large numbers of Latin Americans began taking degrees in the U.S (Gómez-Palacio, 1989, pp. 26-28)¹⁰. Michigan State, Wisconsin, and Stanford were especially common sites for study, and all three universities retained ties to the region over subsequent decades¹¹. CIESPAL’s early research agenda was largely oriented to development studies set within the modernization framework, supplemented by comparative studies of the news outlets in the region. U.S. scholars were front and center in this work, prominent among them Raymond Nixon, the University of Minnesota journalism scholar who was, at the time, serving as president of the UNESCO-sponsored International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR). Michigan State’s Paul Deutschmann led a major CIESPAL modernization study; his Michigan State colleague Everett Rogers continued the work, focused on the diffusion of agricultural “innovations” (Beltrán, 1993, pp. 12-14; Fuentes-Navarro, 2005). The imported U.S. approach was development communication in a double sense: it was designed to aid Latin American modernization, but also—and this was among CIESPAL’s orienting goals—to diffuse the U.S. discipline itself.

That disciplinary project succeeded in a qualified way. The remit of existing Latin American journalism schools was, as in the U.S. before, broadened to include communication research—and a large number of new schools and departments were established in the balance of the decade, most of them undergraduate-only (Daros, 2023, pp. 110-112; Day, 1966; Vassallo de Lopes & Romancini, 2016, pp. 352-353). The institutional spread was justified, at the same time, by the growth of television and other non-print media across the region. By all accounts, CIESPAL was the decisive agent.

By the mid-1960s, the U.S. presence was registered across our four-fold heuristic: people (Nixon, Deutschmann, Schramm, and Rogers), ideas

¹⁰Luis Ramiro Beltrán and Juan Diaz-Bordenave, for example, both studied at Michigan State. France was also a site of study for a number of Latin American scholars.

¹¹See, for example, Stanford’s long entanglements in El Salvador (Lindo-Fuentes, 2009).

(modernization, diffusion), institutions (UNESCO, CIESPAL, the Rockefeller Foundation) and sociopolitical contexts (World War II and the Cold War). The argument could be made—and it soon was, repeatedly—that the U.S. import was an alien imposition, the latest installment in long-running U.S. campaign for hemispheric hegemony. The universalist assumptions of the U.S. model—around the quantitative measurement of short-term, one-way persuasion—were, by the early 1970s, exposed as masked parochialism. The people, ideas, and sociopolitical context of the early CIESPAL moment gave way, but the institutions—the re-cast journalism schools and CIESPAL itself—lived on, adapted to new self-governed aims. The U.S. model started as a source but quickly became a source of contrast, in a discipline soon claimed “*by the Latin Americans and for Latin America*” (Marques de Melo, 1988, p. 411).

Resurgent lefts and dynamic interaction in the middle period: Late 1960s to the early 1990s

The era from the late 1960s into the early 1990s is the most vibrant in the transnational contact zones of the communication field between Latin America and the U.S. Pieces of this chapter of the longer story have been told, but much work remains to be done. The key catalyst was the emergence of the New Left, tied to social movements led by university students, workers, women, Afrodescendants, and Indigenous peoples. Their work sometimes intersected with national independence movements and the Non-Aligned Movement, which sought to counterbalance the geopolitical bi-polarization of Cold War. Those movements were fed by resurgent and often culturally focused Marxisms, post-colonialisms, feminisms, and bottom-up forms of participatory democracy. Among the battlefields were universities and academic fields of knowledge production, in which radicals and reformers sought to transform the customary ways of doing things.

This was the broad context in which dominant U.S. forms of communication research came in for pointed critique. The story was repeated across the social sciences and humanities, but each discipline had its particularities. In communication studies, lines were drawn between camps that were given various names: critical versus administrative research, cultural studies versus mass communication research, Marxism and semiology as against behaviorism and positivism. *Ideology, hegemony, dependency, and imperialism* were preferred concepts for the critical scholars, who offered trenchant critiques of *effects, functions, modernization, and the diffusion of innovations*. Paradigm battles were fought within disciplines, departments, and national contexts, and they



¹²The earliest uses we have found of this label are, in English, Chaffee et al. (1990) and, in Spanish, Marques de Melo (1993b). Marques de Melo seems to have been an important popularizer of the term, whose use in both languages has accelerated since 2000—sometimes in the form Latin American Critical School.

often had a generational dimension to them. They also cut transnationally and fed the development of what by the 1990s was being called the Latin American School/*Escuela Latinoamericana*¹².

Several of the key intellectual figures in the forging of a Latin American alternative to U.S. communication research had formative experiences in the U.S. For good reasons, both epistemological and political, this is a point not often emphasized in the historiography of Latin American communication studies (the European contexts that shaped Eliseo Verón, Antonio Pasquali, Armand Mattelart, and Jesús Martín-Barbero are more commonly featured). We raise it here not as a backhanded way of re-centering the U.S. but rather to draw attention to the social, intellectual, and institutional spaces of interaction that helped birth a new, distinctive, and vitally important formation of communication studies.

Consider four pioneering figures. Juan Díaz-Bordenave (1926–2012) earned his master's degree from the University of Wisconsin (1955) and PhD from Michigan State (1966) and he had long experience working with U.S.-backed development agencies (Fuentes-Navarro, 2022). Luis Ramiro Beltrán (1930–2015) had a similar path that also included grants to study in the U.S. in the 1950s and graduate degrees from Michigan State (MA, 1968; PhD, 1972) (Barranquero, 2014). After taking the first doctorate in the field from a Latin American university (at the University of São Paulo), José Marques de Melo secured a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of Wisconsin (1973–1974). And Paulo Freire (1921–1997) had a series of significant stays in the U.S. between 1967 and 1973. He called the first, to New York City, “an exceedingly important visit,” in which he met impoverished African Americans and Puerto Ricans in similar positions as the dispossessed he worked with in Brazil and Chile (Freire, 1994/2014, p. 44). We need to understand the cross-cultural dynamics of these and similar episodes better, in a way that does not reproduce neo-colonial patterns reifying the significance of “center” against “periphery.”

Beltrán was an especially important figure in mediating North-South relations in the field—among people, ideas, and institutions alike. His intellectual biography opens into broader currents of the Latin American-U.S. interface from the late 1960s and early 1990s. Michigan State was a key transnational locus, particularly before there were doctoral programs in Latin America. Everett Rogers advised his MA thesis, David Berlo, his PhD, and both would credit him with influencing their thought (Barranquero & Ramos-Martín, 2022). In the mid-1970s, Beltrán published in English about Spanish-language Latin American literature that few U.S. scholars were reading. Especially important

were the groundbreaking paper he delivered to the 1974 IAMCR conference in Leipzig and the much-cited “Alien Premises, Objects, and Methods in Latin American Communication Research,” published in a milestone special issue that Díaz-Bordenave also participated in, edited by Rogers and devoted to rethinking development communication (Beltrán, 1974, 1976; Díaz-Bordenave, 1976a; Rogers, 1976).

Beltrán introduced English-language audiences to Armand Mattelart’s (1970) blistering critique of U.S. communication research, published in the remarkable interdisciplinary journal *Cuadernos de la Realidad Nacional*—work that trailed Mattelart’s own Rockefeller Foundation grant to Chile, and his reading of Spanish-language translations of Robert K. Merton, Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, Charles Wright, and Ithiel de Sola Pool¹³. Beltrán (1979), along with Díaz-Bordenave (1976b), also drew upon the work of Frank Gerace, a young American influenced by Freire and working in Bolivia and Perú. Through them, Gerace’s 1973 book *Comunicación Horizontal*, published in Lima, entered the matrix of works that shaped Latin American conceptualizations of horizontal communication as a democratic alternative to the top-down, technocratic, Schramm-style communication theory that fueled classic modernization efforts. Overall, Beltrán facilitated dialogues between critical and objectivist researchers and between South and North and he paved the way for other prominent Latin American scholars to publish in English-language journals—something that Marques de Melo (1976, 1988, 1993a) in particular would influentially do.

Institutionally, Beltrán’s participation in IAMCR congresses pointed to a group of Latin Americans who found space there before the establishment of ALAIC (Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación, est. 1978) or FELAFACS (Federación Latinoamericana de Facultades de Comunicación, est. 1981). IAMCR was active in the region and held its semi-annual conferences in Buenos Aires in 1972 and Caracas in 1980 (Cimadevilla, 2021; Roncagliolo & Villanueva-Mansilla, 2023). The International Communication Association (ICA) would also meet in Acapulco in 1980, providing another structured site for South-North interchange, albeit one built upon the norms of a U.S. professional organization.

The larger contexts of the 1970s and ‘80s for Beltrán and others included the discipline’s institutionalization in Latin America and collective efforts to build forms of socially engaged thought indigenous to the region. The main currents of this history have often been told, though they remain unknown to most U.S. scholars. The roots for a Latin American social science, one generated within and for the region, date back to the late 1940s, and in the

¹³On Mattelart in Chile, see Zarowsky (2013). On the history of modernization-related and critical communication research in Chile from the 1950s through the 1970s, see Davies (1999).



1960s they were unintentionally strengthened by a US counter-revolutionary modernization initiative, the Alliance for Progress (Fajardo, 2021). In the 1960s and '70s, as universities tacked strongly to the political left, the drive for indigenous forms of knowledge gathered force, even as right-wing military dictatorships, often backed by the U.S., drove many left-leaning scholars into exile (on which, see Zarowsky, 2013, 2015). In the early to mid-1970s, CIESPAL, catalyzed by the important San José, Costa Rica meetings of 1973, shook off its U.S. ties and became a site for organizing a truly Latin American field. In 1972, it began a new journal, *Chasqui*, published in Spanish, which centered scholarship from within the region (Daros, 2023). The intellectual and political energy of the era attached itself to the MacBride Commission's 1980 report, which was a main topic of the IAMCR meetings that year in Caracas (Sánchez-Narvarte, 2022). Departments and schools of communication continued to grow across Latin America, though unevenly, with Brasil and México together having some two-thirds of the programs in the late 1980s. Moreover, graduate education and research lagged behind undergraduate education and professional training (Fuentes-Navarro, 1994). Organizing from within networks supported by IAMCR, Latin American scholars founded ALAIC in 1978, though it would languish until 1989, when it was reconstituted and began regular biennial meetings (Marques de Melo, 2011b).

Intellectually, multiple vectors of transnational contact would produce a notable interjection of Latin American thought within leading circles of U.S. communication research. Latin American critics of classic modernization paradigms formulated an account of how development led to new forms of dependency, a word that, by the late 1960s, was “a ubiquitous term in Latin American social science” (Fajardo, 2021, p. 206). The concept then traveled north to the U.S. (as well as to Europe), in which it entered discourses of both radical social scientists and establishment institutions like the Ford Foundation. There were analogous dual pathways for Latin American communication thought. On the one hand, Beltrán and Díaz-Bordenave influenced U.S. development communication researchers from the establishment to make politically moderate revisions to their paradigms. On the other hand, more insurgent leftist scholars like Herbert Schiller and Dallas Smythe—who met Mattelart when they traveled to Chile in 1972 (Schiller & Smythe, 1972)—engaged with Marxissant thought from the South. Mattelart and Ariel Dorfman's *Como leer el pato Donald*, translated into English in 1975, made its way into citations by critical and cultural media studies scholars in the U.S., though typically in passing.

Interestingly, it was mainstream communication scientists like Rogers, Chaffee, Emile McAnany, Brenda Dervin, and Rita Atwood who were among the most committed to facilitating dialogues with critical Latin American scholarship (Atwood & McAnany, 1986; Chaffee et al., 1990; McAnany, 1992; Huesca & Dervin, 1994). They were influenced by their Latin American students or graduate school colleagues and some read Spanish as well. This period of engagement probably came to a head in the mid-1990s, which saw the 1994 English-language translation of Martín-Barbero's *De los Medios a las Mediaciones* (1987), a signal of its interest to Anglophone media and cultural studies, and a special issue on Latin American media in the flagship U.S. *Journal of Communication* (edited by Elizabeth Fox, in 1995). After that, outside those studying Latin American issues, U.S. communication scholars generally oriented themselves to thinking coming from France, Germany, the U.K.—or, in most cases, those they called “Americans,” working along in what they considered *the* communication field.

Neoliberal metastasis: Mid-1990s to today

The end of the Cold War, ongoing decolonization, and the widespread adoption of the internet promised to make the 1990s a time in which changes in geopolitics and technology would combine to create a more inclusive world of media and communication scholarship. This has not come to pass, and the dominance of the U.S. and of the Anglophone world more broadly has found itself powerfully sustained since the turn of the millennium. The 1990s ideal of scholarly globalism, with its visions of radical interconnectedness and multivocality, has largely dissipated into a re-inscription of power relations between Latin America and the U.S., though this is vigorously challenged by Latin American scholars who resist this process and a growing number of scholars from the U.S. who are attuned to their Latin American colleagues' decolonial critiques.

This re-inscription of power relations is apparent in academic publishing, in which the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and Western Europe occupy a dominant position in the social sciences. Demeter (2019a) describes a “center-periphery” structure within the social sciences globally, one that is worse still within communication studies (Demeter, 2019b). The vast majority (90%) of the Social Sciences Citation Index list of communication and media studies journals are published in English-speaking countries (Demeter, 2019b, p. 45). The broader contours of the relationship between the U.S. and Latin America are shaped by this kind of center-periphery structure in publication and citations patterns that obtains globally.



Broader surveys of academic publishing that reveal the dominance of the global North identify factors—such as English language usage, impact factor, and professionalization of research—that reimpose the center-periphery relationship. These same surveys also reveal that these factors—because they represent the extension of global North traditions—are more fiercely imposed at the periphery than at the center. Communication studies in Latin America provides a vivid demonstration of this pattern, as we see illustrated in Heram and Gándara’s (2021) description of the institutional place of Latin American communication scholarship in the 1990s. They describe the 1990s as a time when the “neoliberal’ offensive of capitalism deepened throughout the region,” (p. 38) a development connected to the field of communication becoming professionalized and alienated from its more critical impulses. The distinctively Latin American tradition, which had gained traction in the 1970s and 1980s, confronts this advancing neoliberal logic of incorporation. In the 2000s, amid political and economic crises, the advance of professionalizing tendencies in academic structures has continued but this advance is countered by the region having developed its own journals, organizations, and scholarly culture.

Much of the relationship between communication scholarship in the U.S. and in Latin America can be understood in terms of the stubborn global dominance of the English language in academic publishing. This dominance is connected to broader geopolitical formations, much as Albuquerque (2021) connects “Anglophone western-centrism” in academe to the unipolar power relations that arose in the 1990s (p. 181). This unipolar world invites Latin American scholars to thread their work through “theories, cultural principles and conventions, and research agenda[s] originated in the Anglophone academic milieu” (p. 181). The tremendous potential promised by digital media is sold short by a system that “artificially introduces scarcity and homogeneity” (p. 182).

The effects of this manufactured scarcity and homogeneity find a powerful demonstration in Latin American communication scholarship in the last three decades. By the 1990s, Latin American scholars had begun to develop an interconnected world of schools, journals, conferences, organizations, and intellectual communities that stood in marked counterpoint to the familiar Anglophone power center of the field. The pursuit of a more “global” communication study has operated as a vector out of the North, an external shock that undermines the relevance of Latin American scholarship. Here the introduction of what Albuquerque et al. (2020) refer to as *academic capitalism* bears some consideration. Academic capitalism “refers to the organization” of the academic field “around a logic of market competition, under which academic institutions and professionals are evaluated in terms of their economic efficiency

and compete for prestige and resources” (p. 88). It is a system where rankings of publications come to be an important delivery system for Anglophone dominance. As expectations for scholars in Latin America come to be tied to expectations of impact in the field, these scholars are thrown into the global market for academic work, which is perforce Anglophone journals with largely Northern editorial boards. Publication metrics, such as the Clarivate Journal Citation Reports, appeal to a positivist concern for impact, and their usage across the field becomes a means by which to impel scholars to adjust their work to fit the largely Anglophone system. And so “Latin America’s international status was *downgraded* when the U.S.-centered ranking system” came increasingly to matter to communication studies in the 2000s (p. 197).

An important part of the infrastructure of Latin American media scholarship has been the remarkable number and variety of Spanish- and Portuguese-language journals, many of them established as open access (OA) outlets that demand no article processing charges (APCs). Aguado-López and Becerril-Garcia (2020) remark that these journals “point towards what a scholar-led, non-profit global scholarly communications ecosystem might look like.” They offer a crucial lifeline for the development of Latin American communication studies on its own terms, a lifeline that is challenged as broader currents in academic publishing around the world tend to favor APC-focused publishing models that often have the effect of moving resources to the global North center and away from the periphery. There are still occasional signs of hope; Arroyave et al., (2020) find Colombian communication research attracting more global notoriety thanks to Web of Science. Nevertheless, the dominance of the Anglophone North remains largely intact. The neoliberal logic of a unified global means to calculate academic impact for the sake of ranking in the interest of measuring ‘impact’ clears a path for the reproduction of the dominance of the global North.

The homogeneity expected of scholarship as defined by the Anglophone world conflicts markedly with established practice in Latin American media scholarship. Exclusion of Latin America media scholarship goes beyond the reproduction of an Anglophone linguistic monoculture. The dynamic autonomous tendencies that took root in Latin American communication studies in the 1970s and 1980s enabled the emergence of both a “theoretical and methodological syncretism” and an “emphasis on praxis” in Latin American communication studies (Engel & Becerra, 2018, p. 116). One also finds in Latin American scholarship what Engel and Becerra (2018) refer to as a difference in the “organizational logic of arguments,” (p. 122) in which Latin American scholars are accustomed to a more reflexive and less purely descriptive mode, lending itself to a more essayistic style. Furthermore, authors from Latin America find



themselves expected in a globalized academe to cite work that has already been consecrated as legitimate in the Anglophone world, to the neglect of citations of sources in Spanish or Portuguese (Suzina, 2021). The things that have made Latin American communication scholarship different from the U.S. model have been animated by the same independent spirit that motivated CIESPAL's turn away from U.S. dominance, the founding (and later resurgence) of ALAIC, and the turn to more critical intellectual inspiration from within Latin America (and beyond). As the ostensibly globalized field succumbs to publishing models and ideals of professionalization imported from the global North, all of these distinctively Latin American features come to function as obstacles to broader circulation and impact as insufficiently “professional” means of doing the work.

The centrality of the U.S. has also been reasserted in graduate education since the 1990s. Students have come to the U.S. for graduate degrees for a long time, but this pattern has accelerated since the 1990s as the internet has made it easier for prospective graduate students to find and apply to communication graduate programs in the U.S. At the same time, U.S.-based graduate programs in communication, similarly enabled by the expanded reach of the internet, have also intensified their efforts to recruit students from outside the U.S., including Latin America (Park & Grosse, 2015). Graduate students from the Global South pursuing degrees at communication programs in the U.S. have found themselves transformed into “persons of color the moment they arrive in the country” and “are further translated as international” (Murty, 2021, p. 687), often finding the need for mentoring spaces in which they can speak from their own experiences (Murty, 2021, p. 690). Graduate school pedagogy becomes an important point of contact for #CommunicationSoWhite, wherein students of color must confront the relative lack of concern in the field's canon for race, leaving them in a position to “unlearn the canon” (Mukherjee, 2020, p. 8).

The neoliberal period in this history we are charting has seen the reinvigoration of a movement to resist U.S.-centered dominance of communication study. Though Western control remains a persistent and protean force, the idea of de-westernizing communication study has generated considerable momentum and has connected productively with critiques informed by geopolitics, race, and gender. Together, these movements “tear off the pretense of abstract, aseptic, neutral science” (Waisbord, 2022, p. 26). Latin American communication scholars have been at the forefront of efforts to decolonialize communication studies (e.g., Magallanes Blanco & Ramos Rodríguez, 2016; Torrico, 2016a; Daros, 2022). This happens as U.S. scholars warm to critical theory by Latin American critical scholars, including Aníbal

Quijano and Walter Mignolo, and to the work of Jamaican author and critic Sylvia Winter. What remains to be seen is what will happen in the conflict between this now well-versed chorus of critical voices and the neoliberal impulses that have worked their way into the substrata of academic practice in the twenty-first century.

Whereas the first two eras in our periodization were marked by patterns of interchange—with the first era characterized by one-way U.S. intervention and the second era bringing with it a budding and occasionally vibrant dialogue—the third era is one in which the establishment of a neoliberal knowledge system has emerged as a powerful constitutive force. The long-standing points of contact between the U.S. and Latin America—graduate schools, conferences, professional associations, and publication—continue to foster flows of ideas and people. These flows have intensified since the 1990s. Still, these points of contact find themselves subtended in large part by a neoliberal academic system in which political economic forces are exerted more directly on the relationship between U.S. and Latin American communication studies.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Our conviction is that the writing of disciplinary history has a role to play, a modest one, in the project to win a plural future for the organized study of media and communication. One important means to that end is the work of surfacing alternatives and paths once taken; another is to explain why those paths met resistance or indifference, with the aim to expose the conditions of knowledge production that have helped to narrow the field. In this respect the Latin American historiography of communication research is an example to emulate since so much of it is sensitive to alien premises, objects, and methods, while also motivated to document—in partial defiance of English-language hegemony—alternative ways of framing the field.

This essay was written in a self-reflexive spirit. We began with the hidden parochialism of the U.S. historiography, with its definite-article claims to count the U.S. case as the world's—or as the world's inheritance. Some of our own past work has adopted this frame, implicitly and by omission, which we now regret. The balance of the essay was then an attempt to enter a different, and longstanding, historiographical conversation, one that starts from the complex circulation of ideas, people, and institutional forms within and across borders. The pan-American frame, centered on exchanges between the U.S. and Latin America, is an especially promising site for ongoing work given the fraught geopolitical and intellectual relations that have colored the modern history of



the hemisphere. Our tentative periodization of the cross-regional exchanges of the field, glossed here, is grounded in that promise.

At the same time, we want to acknowledge the dangers of adopting “the Americas” as a shared object of historical attention. Since at least the 1990s, there have been calls to “internationalize,” “de-Westernize,” and “globalize” the field of communication studies. As others (e.g., Albuquerque & Oliveira, 2021; Willems, 2014) have observed, many of these calls have come from scholars comfortably situated within Western Europe and the U.S. and they have sometimes had the effect of occluding longstanding traditions of inquiry in other regions, particularly Latin America, Africa, and East Asia. If we are going to embrace “the Americas” as a frame for historical inquiry, then we need to be on guard against re-inscriptions of U.S. and English-language hegemony, which those of us working in the Anglophone North are deeply implicated in and can (and do) easily perpetuate without awareness. It is part of our institutional and intellectual habitus and it extends outward materially through neoliberal regimes of knowledge. We need to be on guard for ways that calling for a historiography of the field across the Americas might in the end simply recenter the U.S. in new but all too familiar ways.

With those cautions in mind, we suggest that “the Americas” is potentially a productive organizer of knowledge and collaborative inquiry, one with more historical specificity than “internationalized” or “globalized” forms of inquiry can offer. The frame traverses South-North lines in a way that is analogous to the rich collection of essays in the recent volume of work by Latin American and European scholars (Paulino et al., 2020) and by Ibero-American networks that have developed in recent years among Hispanophone and Lusophone scholars. We can also look to the excellent volume of essays by Caribbean and African communication scholars (Dunn et al., 2021) building out from their shared historical experiences. “The Americas” at once calls our attention to flows of ideas, people, and money across the region and the differential processes through which they have been mediated in local contexts. The frame also focuses us geopolitically and allows careful inquiry into the forces of U.S. hegemony, resistance to them, and alternative intellectual formations that developed beyond the North Atlantic. Though Quijano, Mignolo, Wynter, and María Lugones, increasingly make their way into bibliographies and syllabi, the vast majority of U.S. and Western European communication scholars know nothing about Latin American and Caribbean traditions of critical thought, about how scholars from those regions have taken the lead in contemporary efforts to decolonize the field and its forms of knowledge, and about the well-established array of open-access publishing in the region. They neither read

nor cite scholars from outside the North Atlantic, an institutionally structured pattern with its own history (Ganter & Ortega, 2019). From the perspective of the U.S. field alone, “the Americas” offers a regionally focused way to do the ongoing work of provincializing our version of the field. But the real payoff will come when those of us investigating the history of communication studies across the Americas pool our thinking and see what we can discover together. ■

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