Latin American Communication & Media Research. An exploration of the Past, Present and Future of the Field.[1]

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Resumo

This paper reviews the history of Latin American media research from the 1950s through the presente and points out its key distinct characteristics: it studies media embedded in particular historical contexts; focuses on the role of media in democratic practice; seeks to wed theory and practice, and to develop a global communication field in a collective perspective, developing a dialogue with Communication researchers from across the globe. Such dialogue and the propelling of such inquiries across geographical/research boarders, can be, as, Dewey proposed, a way to achieve a 'Great Community' - by understanding the field of communication studies as one (while noting regional and cultural differences), and by modifying the ways in which we understand it from fragmented, to united, we can achieve a public and a community of scholars that hold a truly participatory, all encompassing critical debate.

Palavras-chave: Latin American Communication/media research, historycal analysis, research interchange, collaboration and dialogue

Introduction

It has been argued that traditionally speaking, the underlying dialectical symbiosis of the theoretical and applied is one of the key factors distinguishing Latin American communication theory as a coherent body of work (Huesca & Dervin, 1994, pp. 4, 54). The historical concerns as well as the wedding of theory and practice reflect a body of research that is interested in the flows of communication (Straubhaar, 1991 & 2000), connections between media and social change (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004; Joyce, 2012), and of the television text as a site of mediations, and public discourses about various subjects such as hybridity, citizenship, gender, and race (Martín Barbero, 1982, 1987, 1988, 1993; García Canclini, 2001; Joyce, 2012). More recently, a collective concern amongst such researchers is to wed Latin American Communication and Media Research to its global counterparts – a trend that has been gaining a place of prominence (Bolaño, 2014). In other words, Latin American researchers agree that to further disseminate knowledge on field it is imperative to have collaboration across frontiers, thus, Latin American Communication research needs to happen as an interplay of national, regional and international processes (Carlsson, 2014); and that there is a need for consolidation and

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cohesion within this field of study (Waisboard, 2014). Events such as this – the VI Brazil-US Colloquium on Communication Research offer an optimum space for the exchange of knowledge and novel ideas. A walk through the history of this prosperous field of research will be valuable as we begin digging and breaking new intellectual ground in these next couple of days.

Historical Overview
The 1950s-1960s

Before dwelling in the history of Latin American communication research it is imperative to point that unlike in United States, *communication* and *media studies* have been traditionally used interchangeably in the region. As Waisboard (2014) points out, this creates problems, because it is not as if

> mediated processes completely dominate human communication. The limitation of this confusion is that they are two distinctive yet related fields of study, with different histories, epistemologies, and theoretical grounding (Martino, 2007). Communication as approached from psychology, rhetoric, conversation and language analysis, and ethnomethodology cannot be confused with "mediated" communication that place media industries, organizations, processes, and policies at the center of the analysis (p. 57).

The reason for what Waisboard (2014) calls a "media-centric" agenda stems from the cross-disciplinary interest in the mass media rather than human communication, and the fact that sociologists, philosophers, historians, literary critics, and economists converged in a common, emerging intellectual space where communication/media studies remains within the realm of media and cultural processes (57).

Starting in the 1950s and 1960s media research in Latin America fell primarily within the Development Communication paradigm (Fox, 1997; Fox & Waisbord, 2002). Researchers and industry joined forces to develop a way to use audiovisual technologies to provide education, information and modern values to the masses (Sinclair, 1999). There was a harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between the private media and Latin American governments and media research was non-critical mainly exploring the development potential of mass media such as TV and radio. Gradually, as the power of the media began to show its force, states felt the need to take a more direct role in controlling the media as well as developing their own media, especially as a way to garner votes, and leaders began to attempt to decrease private control, increase national content, and establishing some form of state control over broadcasting as well as the press (Fox, pp. 184; 187-188).

In the mid 1960s, as growing economic and social crises raised questions about the development model, researchers began to examine Latin American national media

structures more critically. Additionally, efforts were made to increase national programming and reduce dependency on foreign content. The failures of development and modernization provided the background that united the study of media and culture with dependency theories. Thus, dependency analysis was born out of the failure of the theories of development (which included efforts in import substitution), and from the realization that dependency was a key explanatory element of the region's economic woes and inability to prosper (Beltrán, 1975, 1980; Dos Santos, 1970; Huesca, 1994; Fox, 1997; Sinclair, 1999).

Around that time, researchers focused on the flows of communication, typical of "dependency theories" that are concerned with the directions and the flows of media messages. They specifically concentrated on the problems of unidirectional information flow, which, according to the theory, usually came from the north to the south and were based on the economic Theory of Dependency. Some of the major works from this time, which discussed dependency theory (which would be the basis for the later "Cultural Imperialism Theory") are: Andre Gunder Frank's (1967) *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America: Historical Studies of Chile and Brazil*; Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto's (1969) *Dependency and Development in Latin America* and Theotonio Dos Santos (1970), *The Structure of Dependence.*

Dependency Theory

In 1967 Gunder Frank proposed the thesis that Latin American economies had been part of the world capitalist system ever since the Spanish Conquest, and that both their internal and external economic relations had been universally characterized by the monopolistic exploitation of the weaker by the stronger (the same language of one flow domination would later be picked up by the cultural imperialism theorists). The author argued that since the sixteenth century until the time he was writing (in the 1960s) such exploitation had remained an essential part of the development of the advanced capitalist countries. Thus, the exploited countries would become increasingly underdeveloped and the exploiters, stronger, more powerful.

In his book, Gunder Frank (1967) dealt with the "development of underdevelopment" in Latin America by using Chile and Brazil as case studies which would stand for the entire region. The author stated that his "general purpose [is] to contribute to the building of a more adequate general theory of capitalist economic development and particularly underdevelopment" adding that "there can be no successful revolution without adequate revolutionary theory. Herein lies my purpose" (p. 13). Furthermore, Gunder Frank (1967) suggested that those countries' history of colonization -

initially Iberian mercantilists, and later British free traders and finally North American investors and foreign suppliers of capital goods - systematically deprived Latin America of the surplus that might have been used to promote its own development. Gunder Frank stressed that the only moments when the underdeveloped countries were able to show economic growth was when the advanced countries were too preoccupied with their own problems to prevent development in "satellite" countries (such as in the early 1930s and during World War II).

Gunder Frank's (1967) ideas were provocative, to say the least. After all, amongst other things, he was suggesting that there was already a capitalist mode of production implemented in the sixteenth century, a time associated with mercantilism. Additionally, the thesis stating that the very development of the relationship between the metropolis and colony determined the underdevelopment of the satellites, since the former expropriated surplus value from the latter was an easy one to swallow. However, Gunder Frank's book encountered harsh criticisms from the get go (Graham, 1967; Kadt, 1967).

For instance, Graham (1967) pointed out that one of the biggest flaws of Andre Gunder Frank's argument was his failure to explain why some colonial areas such as the United States managed to become metropolitan and developed, while others remained underdeveloped and "satellited". While Frank suggested that the US was never a true satellite, Graham pointed out that "he does not specify at what empirically determinable point an area may be said to have become a satellite" (p. 1758). Other authors were unhappy with the book, stating "there is much in the book which is inaccurate or downright wrong" (Kadt, 1967, p. 397). However others (Graham, 1967) were not so gloomy and pointed out that although Frank's ideas did not work as a theory, they worked as a "conceptual framework" (p. 1758). Thus, Gunder Franks's approach was historical. He theorized a world capitalist system which seemed to describe the reality at the time. However, he didn't have a way to account for changes in center-periphery relations.

Perhaps the most insightful idea that flourished from Frank's book and which carried over to other thinkers (Cardoso & Faletto, 1969; Dorfman & Mattelart, 1984; Dos Santos, 1970; Seligson & Passe-Smith, 2003) is the notion stemming from Western Marxism's economic thought that underdevelopment is not merely a condition, in which countries find themselves due to the fact that they have not kept up with the more developed industrial nations. It is a process in which they are caught specifically due to relations between the developed and the underdeveloped because they are a part of a system which generates economic development for the few and underdevelopment for the many.

Notably, as Kadt (1967) noted, what puts Frank's ideas in a deadlock is the assumption that because of this, the underdeveloped have no alternative but to be even more underdeveloped and that a socialist revolution was the only way out (p. 397).

Furthermore, the biggest problem regarding Frank's (1967) book was the disregard for change and adaptation as the author underestimated the capacity of capitalism to change and to adapt to challenges which might be forthcoming from the 'satellites'. The thesis was deterministic, and suggested that the only way out of underdeveloped was the dissolution of the world capitalist system as a whole. In that sense, it implied that "regional development would be impossible" (Kadt, 1967, p. 397). This prospect would later (in the 1970s) be challenged especially when Brazil's TV Globo and Mexico's Televisa started to take a major role in the world television system, by exporting their television programs, to diverse places such as Portugal, Poland, Spain and Monte Carlo (Martín Barbero, 1982, 1987, Mattelart, Delacort, & Mattelart, 1984; Varis, 1984; Torres, 1989; Mattelart & Mattelart, 1990, Straubhaar, 1991).

A few years after Frank's work was published, Cardoso and Faletto (1969) added to the dependency theory body of work by addressing some of its weaknesses – such as its inevitable determinism. In *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, Cardoso and Falleto stressed that developing countries could in fact achieve substantial development in spite of their dependence on foreign businesses, banks, and governments for capital, technology, and trade. This can be exemplified by the very history of TV Globo, which counted on technology and expertise from the USA to initially establish itself, but was able to adapt and re-appropriate corporate and production know-how to become a serious competitor of US media (Fox, 1997; Sinclair, 1999; Straubhaar, 2001; Fox & Waisbord, 2002). Cardoso and Faletto noted that the so called underdeveloped or developing nations could in fact defend national interests and oversee a process of steady economic growth by bargaining with foreign governments, multinational corporations, and international lending agencies.

Perhaps now is a good place to take a break from a walk through this field and point out that while dependency theory research did have a place of prominence, the underlying foundational characteristic of communication research in Latin America is the fact that researchers embraced the idea of communication as critical consciousness (*concientização*) grounded in Marxism, psychoanalysis, and Paulo Freire's work. Research adopted a structuralist approach that focused on the links between communication and social forces and embraced qualitative and critical approaches against what they saw as the prevalence of

quantitative methodologies that served capitalist and imperialist interests, as represented by the US government and foundations. Thus, the notion that intellectual production should be intrinsic to anti-capitalist struggles in the global South was prevalent (Waisboard, 2014, p. 58).

Let's continue our voyage forward and head towards…

The 1970s-1980s

As previously discussed, the 60s and 70s laid the ground for foundational studies that made "original and important contributions to the field at large, most notably, the study of media/cultural imperialism, innovations in communication/media policies, and the intersection between media and cultural dynamics" (Waisboard, 2014, p. 58).

But what is the going on in the historical landscape of the 70s and 80s? In these decades many Latin American countries were dominated by military dictatorships that imposed harsh political censorship on individual journalists, while at the same time allowing the private media industry to develop commercially, as long as it supported the regime. This can be clearly exemplified by TV Globo (Reyes Matta, 1983; Mattelart & Mattelart 1986; Huesca & Dervin, 1994; Fox, 1997; Fox & Waisbord, 2002). Research done around this time was influenced by the socio, political, economical environment of the epoch and critical researchers started to work side by side with alternative communication efforts, usually from their places of exile, against authoritarian regimes. The exiled thinkers spoke out against the state on issues like media and democracy, political communication and alternative communication and began to examine the role of the state more closely in terms of past cultural policies and the relationship between the state and popular culture (Reyes Matta, 1983; Fox, 1997; Fox & Waisbord, 2002).

Theories regarding the flows of communication and cultural imperialism gained prominence in the 1970s with supporters as varied as Luis Ramiro Beltrán (1978), Fernandez Reyes Matta (1977) and Mario Kaplun (1973). Thus, it was not until the 1970s that Latin American scholars started to challenge the traditional transmission model (sender-receiver), calling for the development of alternative theories to guide media practice (Huesca & Dervin, 1994, p. 53). Nevertheless, the body of research which gained prominence in Latin America in the 1970s was based on ideas of cultural imperialism, which were based on cultural dependency and domination theories (Link, 1984). For instance, Beltrán (1987), stated that "cultural imperialism is a verifiable process of social influence by which a nation imposes on other countries its set of beliefs, values, knowledge and behavioral norms as well as its overall style of life" (p. 184).

Schiller (1976), who has "been lauded as one of the major proponents of the cultural imperialism theory" proposed in *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976) the term "cultural imperialism" as opposed to "media imperialism" to explain the ways in which large multinational corporations (including the media), of developed countries dominated developing countries" (White, 2000, ¶4). At the core of the cultural imperialism theory was the belief that there was a very distinct imbalance between the production of media between two or more nations. The idea of *domination* was prominent: it was believed that the ways in which information was exchanged between the nations was based on a mixture of political and/or economic controls. The cultural imperialism theory assumed an active role on the part of the dominating country and a deleterious effect on the dominated one (Boyd-Barret, 1977; Fejes, 1981; Becker, Hedebero, & Paldan, 1986).

A body of research known as Alternative Communication Theory, which emerged in the 1970s critiqued domination models for being too "instrumentalist" and tried to apply some of the theory specifically to Latin America. The literature of the time started to look at audiences as "active in their own oppression, resistance, and opposition through complex processes of cultural appropriation, consumption and production" (Huesca & Dervin, 1994, p. 59). It was within this framework that the literature moved away from dominant and towards liberating models of communication through a restructuring of message flows and a trend towards greater regional exchanges (Martín Barbero, 1982, 1987, Torres, 1989; Varis, 1984, Oliveira, 1993).

Up and onward we go!

The 1980s-1990s

It was during the mid 1980s that the military dictatorships started showing its cracks in most Latin American countries and the transition to democracy gained momentum. The cozy relationship between the authoritarian or military governments and the private media industries in Mexico and Brazil laid the groundwork for Televisa and TV Globo to become the two largest, most monopolistic media conglomerates in the Western Hemisphere. The situation was a bit different in Chile and Uruguay, where the broadcasting industry was more fragmented, and the dictatorships were not able to forge a close political relationship with a private domestic broadcaster, as was the case of Brazil and Mexico (Fox & Waisbord, 2002, pp. 4-5).

It was during this period that cultural imperialism theories suffered the most criticism and a move toward a critical cultural approach became more prominent. The theories were tested and disproved by empirical research (Straubhaar, 1981, 1991; Link,

1984; Ogan, 1988; Liebes & Katz, 1990; Oliveira, 1993; White, 2000). The examples of Mexican based *Televisa*, which is responsible for producing 78% of all its programming and the Brazilian *Globo* Network, producing 80%, managing to secure and dominate their domestic markets to a degree unmatched by any English-speaking market, serve to debunk the theory once and for all (White, 2000, ¶ 23).

As Mattelart & Mattelart (1984) pointed out, these new patterns in global television inspired not just a revision of the theory, but the coining of new concepts to explain the phenomenon. As for the socio political environment of the time, as Escosteguy (2001) stated, during the 1980s, "the social environment was highly politicized; it allowed the intellectuals to manifest their concerns and to take a political role in national cultural debates. The challenge was to produce some knowledge about the social that would not only mean a renewal of themes, objects and methods but would also mean projects that were able to relate the development of communication with the strengthening of agency, and citizenship (p. 868).

Critical research of the time (for example, Straubhaar, 1981, 1991; and O'Connor, 1991) called attention to what they deemed as the biggest flaw in the media imperialism tradition: the fact that the theory did not acknowledge the audience's ability to process information and interpret messages differently based on their individual background (questions of class, gender, ethnicity, etc., are not taken into account). It was within this criticism that Straubhaar introduced the terms "asymmetrical interdependence" and "cultural proximity" as a more precise and complex way to deal with the debunk notion of cultural imperialism.

According to Straubhaar (1991), "cultural proximity" is the idea that audiences are deemed as actively searching for a cultural proximity in cultural goods as a way to incorporate the role of the "active audiences" (*a la* Stuart Hall) concept into the media imperialism debate. Additionally, "asymmetrical interdependence" considers the limits imposed by dependency theories and the growth in cultural industries and technological changes. Straubhaar examined how national cultural industries (in particular Brazilian television), have the ability to grow in their capacity as production structures. This is clearly reflected in the genres they produce and export (such as telenovelas). Thus, asymmetrical interdependence refers to a variety of possible relationships in which countries find themselves unequal, but possessing variable degrees of power and initiative in economics, politics, and culture. Scholars of this line of study recognized the strength of powerful media countries but called attention for the aspect of relative interdependence as opposed to

total dependency between a "weak" and "strong" nation (Varis, 1984; Rogers & Antola, 1985; Straubhaar, 1991).

In sum, as White (2000) stated, like neo-Marxism, cultural imperialism is a body of research that was very specific to the time period in which it was being proposed. For instance, the Frankfurt School offered an explanation and critique of society and media that were particular to the time period, the 1930s and 1940s, in which it was proposed. Cultural imperialism made sense in the time in which it was proposed, the 1970s. However; with the advent of modern communication technologies as well as the success of regional productions that allowed for a multi-directional as opposed to a unidirectional flow of information between countries, cultural imperialism is no longer a useful framework for explaining the same phenomena that it was applied to in the 1970s. Thus, its scope is limited and cannot be used to explain media relations between nations at different points in time. The theory of cultural imperialism was developed in the 1970s to explain the media situation as it existed at that time. The nature of media (i.e., print, radio and television), at that time, promoted a one-way, top-down transmission system from dominant country to dominated country that theoretically gave rise to a passive audience and a powerful media (¶¶ 45-26).

For example, Latin American telenovelas have large audiences in Poland, China, Russia, and Spain, just to mention a few countries. Mexico's ECO news service and Galavision are seen in countries of Europe and North America. On a smaller scale, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Chile and Colombia have become cultural exporters, their radio and television industries filling time on satellite services, cable systems, and radio networks in the region and targeting the large Hispanic audiences in the United States (Fox, 1997, p. 187).

Therefore, it is clear that since the 1980s Latin American media theory has shown influences from the critical cultural studies perspectives. The audiences began to be seen as active and not passive in their ability to produce meanings. They are also viewed as being active actors in their own oppression, albeit capable of resistance and opposition, and processes such as cultural creation and consumption, incorporation and production (Huesca & Dervin, 1994, pp. 53, 60). It is thus apparent that the intense, often fiercely critical dialogue of the Latin American research community with media and culture in their societies reflects the changing relationship between the state and the media. In Fox's (1997) words, it additionally "accounts for the relative insularity of the Latin American research community, which largely has followed its own path, taking from outside intellectual

currents what it needs to fuel its arguments, but usually returning to its internal dialogue, shaped principally by the evolving relationship between the media and the state" (p. 185).

Amongst the most prominent writers who were influenced by theories of hegemony in the late 1980s and mid 1990s for example, are Nestor García-Canclini and Jesus Martín-Barbero who started to develop more sophisticated theories and to create new concepts such as "hybridization", "syncretism", and "mestizaje" (the mixture a Spanish and Indian blood) to guide inquiry. These studies of popular culture in Latin America revealed the contradictions, mixtures and syncretism that make up the supposedly "traditional" attitudes of the people of Latin America. Martín-Barbero and García Canclini showed that cultural identity is not only the product of the imposition of the strong on the weak or the foreign on the national, but a mixture of acceptance, rejection and re-elaboration, continually under negotiation, questioning theories of dependency and domination.

Although the terms mestizaje and syncretism (mostly used by Martín-Barbero) were seen as a cultural product that stayed away from complete opposite dualities such as "indigenous versus alien", the terms encountered criticism due to its association with biology and religion. Thus, García-Canclini coined the term hybridization, to fix that. What these terms have in common is that they take away the focus on dialogue alone and place it on popular culture as an important place of analysis of media practice in and theory. As Waisbord suggests, Canclini's "notion of "hybrid cultures" illustrated an argument about the complex dynamics of cultural traditions and expressions in the region." Additionally, "his conclusion helped to reposition the study of culture within communication studies and raised warnings about making ambitious deductions about cultural processes from the analysis of media texts and systems (p. 60).

In addition to the authors mentioned above, other prominent figures in Latin American Cultural Studies (LACS) are Carlos Monsiváis (1978), and José Carlos Mariátegui (1971). These authors' works can be identified as cultural studies in a couple of ways: First, their research is characterized by a particular response to industrial capitalism, more specially the effects of the culture industries in transforming the texture of everyday life. At times this involves some notions of uneven development theory. It also involves an argument for a global system of late capitalism and its cultural production, or "postmodernism". Secondly, LACS traces networks of influence and diffusion of ideas in the likes of twentieth century authors such as Williams, Barthes, Althusser, Foucault and Gramsci.

In studying media and popular culture (inspired by Gramsci and Benjamin), Martín-Barbero developed his theory of *mediations* (or "in the moments") and *mestizaje*, in direct contrast to "cultural domination" and "ideological uses of the media". In *Communication, Culture and Hegemony: From Media to Mediations* (1993), the author examined aspects of hegemony, resistance and audience appropriation and participation. What was especially innovative about Martín-Barbero's theory was the fact that it took into consideration a very specific Latin America context, as illustrated by one of the examples he discusses: the mediation of the telenovelas.

Martín-Barbero (1993) traced important connections with European theorists of popular culture, who drew upon resistance, audience participation and agency, as well as hegemony are especially well suited for Latin American media research, which was traditionally viewed as being somewhat subjugated to "media imperialism", as we have seen. For instance, Gramsci and Benjamin place great importance in the people's role as active producers of meanings, capable of creating their own identities in a process of resistance to cultural domination through media texts.

Part of this idea of subverting, appropriating and re-appropriating media messages are in direct contrast with previous ideas laid out by Adorno and Horkheimer in "*The Culture Industry*", but on the other hand are in tune with some of Benjamin's thoughts discussed in "*The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*". For instance, Benjamin opposed elitists' conceptions of intellectual production, art, and culture, when he raised questions about ritual, traditions, the aura of works of art, as well as people's experience to them. Examining the Latin-American context, Martín-Barbero (1993) looked at specific moments (*mediaciones*) of popular culture: place, time, reception, recognition and appropriation. The turn he takes is that he shifts the focus from media to mediations. Again, this concept of mediations and the agency it allows people is contrasted to Adorno's view of the Cuture Industry as well as dependency theories (pp. 40-53).

Rather than simply looking at culture as a capitalist "mode of production", Martín-Barbero looks at "modes of media uses" in the everyday lives of different Latin Americans. Although he recognized the powerful influences of the media, he also ascribed credit to the people, who he viewed as perfectly capable of mediating the cultural processes and creating their own identities. Barbero is interested in "the new combinations and syntheses, the *mestizajes* that reveal not just the racial mixture that we come from but the interweaving of modernity and the residues of various cultural periods, the mixture of social structure and sentiments (1993, p. 2).

Thus, we can affirm that it is "thanks to García Canclini and Martin-Barbero that communication and cultural studies have been tied at the waist in Latin America" and that their most significant contribution was that "different sets of questions needed to be asked about "the media" by placing texts/industries within the study of cultural dynamics". Additionally, research on "media audiences", "cultural consumption" and "youth culture", which have exploded since their landmark books, are indebted to their ideas. These works capped the early intellectual development of the field in Latin America in the 1980s (Waisbord, 2014, p. 60).

Almost at the top. We can do it!

The 1990s-2000s

After emerging from years of dictatorships, the countries in the region embraced a neo-liberal economic agenda, which had serious consequences for its national media systems (Lugo-Ocando, 2008, p. 5). Thus, two parallel forces, local politics and the globalization of media markets shaped the development of Latin American media in the 1990s and 2000s. Additionally, the twin ideas of public service and protectionism were never the organizing principles of broadcasting systems, but intervention by the state and political manipulation of the media held back the expansion of market forces. The results were media systems featuring mixed elements that according to government policies and historical situations in specific countries, showed influences of either state, or market centered conceptions (Fox & Waisboard, 2002, pp. IX, 1). On the media research arena, as Escosteguy (2001) noted, having at first resisted being labeled as practioneers of cultural studies, some of the Latin American scholars began to identify themselves as such" and "foreign researchers also started to identify the work of these scholars as such (p. 862). Amongst the Latin American cultural studies works of this time we highlight again Martín-Barbero (1993) and García Canclini (2001, 2003) as well as Larse (1996), Fox (1997), Lull (1998), Escosteguy (2001), Fox & Waisbord (2002) amongst others.

As Escosteguy (2001) noted, one factor that made the turn to cultural studies possible was the intellectuals' interest in the contemporary social ferment. They were acutely aware of the popular social movements fighting against repression and discrimination, as well as for equality and changes in everyday life, such as community associations, mothers and youth clubs, and black rights, to mention a few. As the author stated: "To sum up, a combination of factors provided suitable conditions for the emergence of the cultural studies approach in Latin America" (p. 864). Additionally, the socio political economical period reflected the research of the time, which was one of disenchantment.

"The weakening of the role of the state in the face of rising neoliberalism, and a loss in the power of the nation-state and in its capacity to manage the growing social inequalities" (…) inspired the wok of the two major contributors to the cultural studies scene in Latin America: Nestór García Canclini and Jesús Martín Barbero (Escosteguy, 2001, p. 868).

Telenovelas

As one can imagine, it is impossible to discuss Latin American Media Research without mentioning telenovelas. This is two fold: because of its broad scope and because it is one the present author's favorite topic of analysis. Therefore, we once again highlight Martín-Barbero's contributions. Published in 1987 and translated into English in 1993 Martin-Barbero's *From Media to Mediations* pointed out the importance of using mediations in order to understand the success of telenovelas abroad but especially in the Latin American region. The author drew on Bakhtin to suggest that the genre is "'carnivalesque", where the author, the reader, and characters constantly change places. It is an exchange, confusion between story and real life, between what the actor does and what happens to the spectator" (p. 228).

Noteworthy is the fact that Martín Barbero is highly critical of the genre and recognizes the commercial nature of the telenovelas – "within its openness and confusion lies a commercial logic" (p. 228). However, he stresses that the genre should not be reduced to an instrument of ideology and the Culture Industry: "To reduce this crossroads of different logics to a question of marketing is to deny the existence of other cultural experiences of matrices is methodologically incorrect and politically flawed" (p. 228). Thus, he sees the telenovela as a place of negotiation, reconfiguration, mediation of popular culture and identity, a site of hegemonic struggle. As previously discussed, the core concept of the theory of mediations and *mestizajes* is Martin-Barbero's belief in the audience as intelligent and active, capable to subvert and resist, as well as to appropriate media messages.

The interdisciplinary nature of Latin American Cultural Studies is also witnessed in García Canclini's later works, where he shows a concerned with how communication researchers should study the cultures constituting modernity in Latin America – again using the term hybridity in lieu of mestizaje, as he viewed the latter as possibly excluding historical and social differences - which "hybridity" does not. Canclíni reminded us that the differences are important especially since "none of this takes place without contradictions and conflicts. Cultures do not co-exist with serenity" (García Canclini, 1989, p. 371).

Furthermore, and extremely pertinent to our dialogue in this event, is the fact that in *Hybrid Cultures*, Canclini asks how can the partial knowledge of the different disciplines that are concerned with culture be brought together to elaborate a more plausible explanation of the contradictions and failures of modernization. Additionally, the author was interested in how to capture the hybrids of culture and make them understandable in the context of often less than transparent cultural policies (García Canclini, 1989). As we can notice, Canclini's work on media and popular culture has also been intrinsically connected to the socio political economical climate that surrounds him. Additionally, "it is necessary to recognize that García Canclini's cultural hybridism conception erodes the binary way of thinking through oppositions such as traditional versus modern, popular versus massive, foreign versus local, among other formulas, which characterized the development of Latin American cultural investigation" (Escosteguy, 2001, p. 866).

In his book *Consumers and Citizens: Globalization and Multicultural Conflicts* (2001), the author examines what he calls "consumerism as citizenship" and discusses how in the current time, especially in Latin America, citizenship, consumerism and hybridity are connected, since in all of them there is a sense of self-understanding that comes into play. García Canclini starts out by referring to his initial thoughts on hibridity by explaining that: "In Latin America, modernization and development remain vital issues that are named as such in the discussions that reflect and create national self-understanding" (García Canclini, 1989, p. 373). Later, the author suggests that currently, identity construction through consumption actually have more power over individuals than national allegiances and that due to globalization, what used to be a political category – citizenship – becomes an economical one: consumer.

Furthermore, Canclíni (2001) proposed that currently, instead of looking at national symbols, people look at Hollywood, *Televisa*, *TV Globo* and MTV to construct their identity: "For many men and women, especially youth, the questions specific to citizenship, such as how we inform ourselves, and who represents our interests, are answered more often than not through private consumption of commodities and media offerings than through abstract rules of democracy or through participation in discredited political organizations" (García Canclini, 2001, p. 5).

In *Consumers as Citizens*, Canclini (2001) is not simply referring to consumption as the power to buy commodities. The author does not see consumption as "an unreflexive site of useless expenditure". He sees in consumption the "possibilities for interaction and critical reflection" (p. 45). Thus the book is in line with current Latin Media research, based

on a historical tradition that sees itself linked to a strong connection to social movements, self-reflexivity and social praxis. Self-reflexivity and *concientizacion* are still fundamental issues for Latin American media researchers as those scholars place great importance in the people and in the media, and use liberating models of pedagogy and communication.

Let's take a detour and contemplate a different scenario, intrinsic to our broad field:

Entertainment-Education

The previously discussed ideas by Canclini can be tied to Miguel Sabido's (2004) entertainment-education method, which adds to a body of research that concerns itself with a quest for communication theories of and for democratic practice and the creation of multiple voices and public spheres. As research shows, although a "direct-effect" is not credited to the Sabido method, it has been recognized to have stimulated critical discussions about the topics highlighted in the telenovelas that adopt the strategy. Thus, the "consumer as citizen" thesis makes sense, as political actions can elevate consumers of telenovelas to citizens: with a "conception of a market that is not only a place for the exchange of commodities, but as part of more complex socio-cultural interactions. Similarly, consumption is seen not so much as the individual possession of isolated objects, but rather as the collective appropriation (…) of commodities that provide symbolic needs, and that serve to transmit and receive messages" (García Canclini, 2001, p. 46).

As Martín-Barbero pointed out, the success of the telenovelas could possibly be linked to the failure of social and political institutions (García Canclini, 2001, p. 147), which again, ties to the ideas discussed previously by Canclini referring to the fact that people look more and more to media offerings than to abstract rules of democracy due to a discredit in political organizations (p. 5). Thus, "consumption can be a site of cognitive value, it can be good for thinking and acting in a meaningful way that renews social life" (p. 47).

As we approach the present state of Latin American Communication research field, and start to look onward to the future, it is noteworthy to point out that although media research in Latin America has been preoccupied with questions of agency, and identity, there seems to be a disconnect between reception studies and feminism in Latin America. As O'Connor, (1991) has pointed out a clear Feminist research is "lacking" in the area. Although the author recognizes that important Feminist Studies have been done in Latin America within ILET (Instituto Latinoamericano de Estudios Transnacionales), such as Santa Cruz (1983) and Santa Cruz & Erazo (1980), (and more recently, Acosta-Alzuru,

2003, Joyce, 2009) the author points out that a "feminist consciousness is noticeably absent from the work of authors such as Martín Barbero and García Canclini (pp. 60, 68).

Furthermore, as Escosteguy (2001) stated, "in general terms, the condition of women does not have a meaning in most studies. The assumption seems to be that this subject does not deserve to be studied in depth at the theoretical level. Generally, in the case of reception studies, the concern around the condition of women contributes to the understanding of "identities" as culturally constructed but avoids the specificity of women's issues". The author adds that "actually, there is no feminist perspective in this Latin American branch of cultural studies" (p. 870). While these statements seem indeed extreme, the Feminist Agenda is in fact dim.

Present turf and future pastures

So what is ahead of us? As we prepare ourselves for these next two days of intellectual conversation, collaboration and inquiry, it is worthwhile pointing out that according to Waisbord (2014) one of the biggest challenges in Communication Studies as a discipline faced by scholars in our region today is the fact that the "field remains united yet fragmented in multiple, parallel lines of research" (p. 55). By this he means that while the work is historically deeply grounded on a common intellectual foundation, it has more recently been empirically fragmented, and suggests that researchers should "adopt an analytical position that places theoretical questions at the center, engages with arguments produced in different settings, and participates in broad debates in the global community of communication and media scholars" (p. 55). Thus, a dialogue – or in words: Communication (pun intended) between and across various cultures is imperative in search of this common goal – and we are privileged to be participating in an event that aims to promote such intellectual dialogue: The VI Brazil-US Colloquium on Communication Research.

This move towards dialogue and collaboration is currently a clear trend: For example, as Ulla Carlsson (2014) demonstrates, the importance of collaboration across frontiers as an interplay of national, regional and international processes is imperative, as well as a decisive step towards the development and improvement of the study of media/ communication. We – Sonia and I - could not agree more and are excited about the conversations we are about to have.

Final Contemplations:

A few distinguishing conclusions can be drawn from this extensive literature Review or "walk through the field": First, communication studies in Latin America grew

out of a common intellectual trajectory, contrary to the West, where the history of the field is fragmented, and lacks a clear unified history (Waisbord, 2014; Cooren, 2012). On the other hand, the study of the field in that region lacks specific theoretical approaches such as pragmatism and phenomenology; disciplinary traditions such as social psychology, cognitive psychology and feminism, in addition to research subjects such as media effects and conversation analysis (Waisbord, 2014; Escosteguy, 2001),

Secondly, research in Latin America has followed a tradition that revolves around the relationship between the people, state, and the media, and about how to construct truly democratic media within largely free-market economies. This requires an examination of the rights and obligations of the individual, the audiences uses of mediated messages, the organizations of civil society, and the increasingly autonomous, powerful, and transnational, media and culture industries (Fox, 1997, p. 199). A unifying object of study amongst this trend (as indicated previously) is the study of telenovelas. From Martín-Barbero, Straubhaar, García Canclini, and Mattelart & Mattelart in the 1970's and 1980's, to Fox, García Canclini, Fadul, Sabido and Joyce in the 1990s and 2000, this trend is also clear.

These works stress the need to go beyond dependency theories, cultural imperialism and an ideological analysis of the manipulative and commercial role of the media, more specifically telenovelas. As Fadul (1993) argued in *Serial Fiction in TV: The Latin American Telenovelas*, the genre should be understood as a richer and more complex phenomenon and its positive contribution in behavior change should be recognized. This is especially the case in Brazil and Mexico where telenovelas have been used as a vehicle for family planning and health programmes (Fadul, 1993; Fox, 1997, LaPastina, 2004; Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004.).

Revisionist views of the "one way flow" of information have drawn attention to the contemporary and complex flows that resulted from technological changes and the maturation of television industries in different countries and regions, forcing us to rethink the "domination" debates of 1960s and 1970s. There is no single dominant center that exports content to other less developed regions. It is important to think of Latin American media as a "patchwork quilt", one that is formed by multilayered flows of capital as well as programming (Sinclair, Jacka & Cunningham, 1996; Fox & Waisbord, 2002).

Finally, within the diverse body of media and society research done in the region, from the 1950s till today – from the state's initial support and encouragement of the private commercial media; the confrontations and conflicts between media owners and reformists

governments; the state's control over the media by authoritarian regimes; and finally a return to democracy privatization and the freedom of the market and from censorship – two key factors make Latin American Communication research distinct: First: Latin American Researchers do not ignore the social and political context within which the they are working. Studies by scholars in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Peru, inquire about communication itself, which is understood as a 'web of words and desires, memories and structures of feelings, social divisions and cultural discontinuities, appropriations and resistances that the media mediate and with which the people knit together their everyday lives' (Martin-Barbero and Munoz, 1992, p. 6). As a final point, in an attempt to comprehend communication processes, the studies examine the contexts in which media texts are viewed and the modes of viewing by the audiences, which is made up of different gender, class, age, and social groups. The works are also descriptive and interpretive of the production processes, the "texts" and audience viewings, "readings" and mediations of media (Fox, 1997; pp. 184, 199).

Additionally, as Waisbord (2014) points out, unlike the discipline's scholarship in the United States and various European countries, Latin American communication research is built upon a common theoretical and analytical ground laid down in the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, these foundational studies made original and important contributions to the field at large, such as to the study of media/cultural imperialism, innovations in communication/media policies, and the intersection between media and cultural dynamics (p. 56). The downfall, according to the author, is the lack of an analytical position that, amongst other things, place theoretical questions at the center.

What we are trying to accomplish with our Colloquium goes hand in hand with Waisbord's goal: To develop Communication research as dialogue, interchange and cross-communication between the disciplines research in different cultures. The author cites Claude Levi-Strauss artfully, as Levi-Strauss suggested that understanding other cultures is useful to understanding our own, which can be fruitfully applied to the study of academic cultures. Thus, specific characteristics of scholarly fields in particular geographical settings become salient in comparison to others (Waisbord, 2014, p. 56). Such dialogue and the propelling of such inquiries across geographical/research boarders, can be, as, Dewey proposed, a way to achieve a 'Great Community' - by understanding the field of communication studies as one and by modifying the ways in which we understand it from fragmented, to united, in order to achieve a public and a community of scholars that hold a truly participatory, all encompassing critical debate.

Conversations, collaborations, and exchanges such as the dialogue promoted by events such as this – the US-Brazil Colloquium are key tools to take us there. Join us in what promises to be a truly dynamic event. Let's get this party started!

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