Media, Intellectual, and Cultural Imperialism Today

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Abstract

Cultural imperialism was once the subject of a vibrant debate in international scholarship. Yet, the debate on cultural imperialism has lost much of its previous influence and centrality. This does not mean that cultural imperialism has lost its relevance. On the contrary, in the wake of the neoliberal globalization process, cultural imperialism is now stronger than ever. This article argues that cultural imperialism comprises two dimensions: media imperialism and intellectual imperialism, and it is important to understand how they interact. To illustrate how their interplay works and what consequences follow, the article examines how US academic institutions educated and organized Brazilian media elites who helped to legitimate Lava Jato, a politically driven judicial operation that led to the downgrade of Brazilian democracy, and ultimately paved the way to the rise of Jair Bolsonaro to the presidency.

Resumen

En un tiempo el imperialismo cultural fue tema de debate acalorado en los estudios internacionales. Sin embargo, dicho debate ha perdido gran parte de su anterior influencia y centralidad, lo que no quiere decir que el imperialismo cultural carezca hoy de relevancia; al contrario, como secuela del proceso neoliberal global se ha fortalecido más que nunca. En este artículo se argumenta que el imperial-

ismo cultural abarca dos dimensiones—el imperialismo mediático y el imperialismo intelectual—y que es importante entender cómo interactúan. Para ilustrar dicha interacción y sus consecuencias, se analiza cómo las instituciones académicas estadounidenses formaron y organizaron a las élites mediáticas brasileñas que ayudaron a legitimar Lava Jato, una operación jurídica con fines políticos que terminó degradando la democracia brasileña y allanando el camino para que Jair Bolsonaro llegara a la presidencia.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, cultural imperialism was the subject of a vibrant debate in international scholarship. At that time, intellectuals and activists around the world raised concerns about the threat posed by the US media to other cultures. In response, UNESCO published a report in 1980 proposing a New World Information and Communication Order. However, attention to this topic has declined sharply since then. To be sure, cultural imperialism is still a topic of interest in the intellectual milieu, especially with respect to media imperialism[1] and, more recently, platform imperialism.[2] Yet, the debate on cultural imperialism has lost much of its previous influence and centrality. A new batch of emerging concepts, such as "Americanization,"[3] "globalization,"[4] and "asymmetric interdependence"[5] came to replace cultural imperialism as an analytical tool for describing the cultural influence exerted by powerful countries over others. Furthermore, the ties between cultural imperialism scholarship and anti-imperialism activism are much weaker now than in the past. Finally, present-day Anglophone scholars (in many cases working from the same countries described as cultural imperialists) exert a leading role in the international scholarship on cultural imperialism.[6] There is some irony in that.

This article proposes that this decline in the scholarly interest in cultural imperialism did not happen because cultural imperialism itself lost relevance in the real world and ceased to exist. Instead, I argue just the opposite: that at present, in the wake of the neoliberal globalization process,[7] cultural imperialism is stronger than ever. Since the 1990s, the logic of cultural imperialism has penetrated deeply into international scholarship, allowing western (especially US) institutions to set the standards for global scholarship. These circumstances contributed significantly to discouraging research on cultural imperialism. I aim here to discuss how this has happened and provide evidence of some contemporary features of cultural imperialism.

To fully understand this statement, it is necessary to precisely define cultural imperialism. Here, the first step is to note that two scholarly traditions have used the term to describe different phenomena. *Intellectual* imperialism refers to the means that certain countries employ to exert intellectual dominance over others. This effort is primarily directed at the elites of less powerful countries. Intellectual imperialists try to convince these elites about the intellectual (and moral) superiority of their own societies, which are presented as role models for others.[8] This can be accomplished via high culture, the academic apparatus, and think tanks. The other phenomenon is *media* imperialism, which employs the media as a resource to conquer the hearts and minds of the public in general and influence pub-

[1] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, "Cultural Imperialism and Communication," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, June 2018; Oliver Boyd-Barrett and Tanner Mirrlees, eds., *Media Imperialism: Continuity and Change* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); and Kaarle Nordenstreng, "How the New World Order and Imperialism Challenge Media Studies," *tripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique* 11, no. 2 (2013).

[2] Stuart Davis, "What is Netflix Imperialism? Interrogating the Monopoly Aspirations of the 'World's Largest Television Network,' " *Information, Communication, and Society* 26, no. 6 (2023); and Dal Y. Jin, *Digital Platforms, Imperialism, and Political Culture* (London: Routledge, 2015).

[3] Jeremy Tunstall, *The Media are American: Anglo-American Media in the World* (London: Constable, 1977).

[4] John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Continuum, 1991).

[5] Joseph D. Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism: Asymmetrical Interdependence and Cultural Proximity," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 8, no. 1 (1991).

[6] Manuel B. Aalbers, "Creative Destruction through the Anglo-American Hegemony: A Non-Anglo-American View on Publications, Referees, and Language," *Area* 36, no. 3 (2004); and Afonso de Albuquerque, "The Institutional Basis of Anglophone Western Centrality," *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 1 (2021).

[7] Efe C. Gürkan, *Imperialism after the Neoliberal Turn* (London: Routledge, 2022); and David Harvey, *The New Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[8] Syed Farid Alatas, "Intellectual Imperialism: Definition, Traits, and Problems," *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science* 28, no. 1 (2000); and Afonso de Albuquerque, "Transitions to Nowhere: Western Teleology and Regime-Type Classification," *International Communication Gazette* 85, no. 6 (2023).

lic opinion. Although scholars sometimes refer to both as "cultural imperialism," concretely the dialogue between them is quite limited.

This article proposes a new approach to cultural imperialism that considers the interplay between intellectual and media imperialisms. Based on this, I identify an emerging dynamic of media imperialism operating nowadays. Here, media imperialism does not primarily have to do with exporting media content from imperialistic countries to others. Rather, this model of cultural imperialism works through education and network-building. Its key purpose is to prepare the local media elites and professionals to act as local agents, echoing the cultural imperialistic agenda. This article pays special attention to how the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas has promoted educational initiatives and social networks aimed at modeling Brazilian journalistic practices and worldviews in accordance with US interests. The case of Lava Jato gives us a concrete example of how US interference in Brazilian politics engaged the cultural imperialism networks.

Cultural Imperialism, Media Imperialism, and Intellectual Imperialism

What do cultural imperialism, media imperialism, and intellectual imperialism have in common? What distinguishes them? The definitions of these terms are mostly imprecise. Cultural imperialism has served as a synonym for both intellectual imperialism[9] and media imperialism.[10] However, very few studies take intellectual imperialism and media imperialism together as different aspects of a broader cultural imperialism phenomenon. For this reason, this section offers a conceptual framework for these concepts.

The most important aspect to consider is that they are all particular features of a more general phenomenon: imperialism. It is worth noting that much of the research on media imperialism has ignored this basic lesson. There are different ways to approach imperialism. Lenin's definition of it as "the highest stage of capitalism" is very popular among many scholars. However, it is not particularly useful for our purposes, as it focuses mainly on the economic aspects of imperialist relations. By contrast, this article emphasizes the political aspects of imperialism, more related to the power exerted by some societies over others. Both state and non-state agents perform important roles in this respect.

First of all, some conceptual clarification is needed. Recently, international scholarship has given a lot of attention to the need to decolonize media and communication research.[11] Colonialism and imperialism focus on the same problem, but from different view-

[9] Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant, "On the Cunning of the Imperialist Reason," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 1 (1999).

[10] Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2015).

[11] Antje Gluck, "De-Westernization and Decolonization in Media Studies," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*, December 2018; and Last Moyo, *The Decolonial Turn in Media Studies in Africa and the Global South* (New York: Springer, 2020).

points. Literature on colonialism often focuses on the societies that fell victim to colonization. In most cases, it is assumed that colonialism is an event that took place in the past but still exerts a negative influence on the societies that experienced it. In particular, the literature on decolonization primarily associates colonialism with Western European nations.[12] In other cases, literature on imperialism focuses on the colonizers. Imperialism derivates from "empire" but looks at it from a negative perspective. Very often, it refers to societies that act as empires, although they pretend not to be so.[13] Since the end of World War II, most references to imperialism have been directed to the United States.[14] It is worth noting that, recently, the decolonial rhetoric has been appropriated by agents associated with the US industrial-military apparatus as a tool for legitimizing US interests in the international arena. A recent example comes from the article "Decolonize Russia," written by Casey Michel and published in *The Atlantic*, a vehicle closely related to NATO. Michel argues that Russia obtained its huge territory by colonizing other people, which is true. He proposes that, to contain its aggression (as recently demonstrated in Ukraine), it would be necessary to fragment Russia into many independent countries.[15] The "decolonize Russia" agenda has been given voice in several other sources, including the UK's BBC.[16] However, the very same argument applies to the United States as well. The US also expanded its territory at the expense of native people, and its foreign policy is indeed much more aggressive than Russia's. This suggests that the "decolonial" rhetoric has been appropriated by the US military-industrial complex and has thus become a tool for the US imperialistic agenda.

Cultural imperialism refers to efforts aimed at providing cultural legitimacy to imperialism. It aims to make the population of the society subjected to imperialism arrangements—or at least some fractions of it—accept the imperialism domination as unavoidable or even desirable. They do this by presenting the culture of the imperialist countries as being essentially superior to the culture of the countries submitted to them. Cultural imperialism employs different approaches to reaching this objective.

Intellectual imperialism refers to efforts targeting the intellectual elites. The international scholarship system is one of the most important grounds on which intellectual imperialism operates. Universities are an important part of this system, but other institutions, such as academic ranking systems, the "quality journals" system, and funding institutions, among others, are very important, too.[17] In a general manner, this system pre-determines who is able to formulate "world-class" theories and who is not.

[12] W. D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

[13] Krishan Kumar, "Colony and Empire, Colonialism and Imperialism: A Meaningful Distinction?" *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 63, no. 2 (2021).

[14] Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *Para leer al Pato Donald: Comunicación de Masa y Colonialismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veinteuno, 1971); and Herbert I. Schiller, *Mass Communications and the American Empire* (New York: A. M. Kelley, 1969).

[15] Casey Michel, "Decolonize Russia," *The Atlantic*, May 27, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/05/russia-putin-colonization-ukraine-chechnya/639428/.

[16] "Decolonising Russia," *Sounds*, BBC Radio 4, February 27, 2024, radio broadcast, 28:00, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001wq4c.

[17] Albuquerque, "The Institutional Basis"; and Simon Marginson and Marjikvan der Wende, "To Rank or to Be Ranked: The Impact of Global Rankings in Higher Education," *Journal of Studies in International Education* 11, no. 3/4 (2007).

Media imperialism works differently. It aims to conquer the hearts and minds of common people through the diffusion of media content from some countries to others. In this case, cultural influence is exerted through subtle means. Media products do not frequently convey explicit political messages. Rather, they work by deeming a universal status for culture-specific values and aesthetic forms.

Intellectual Imperialism

Syed Hussein Alatas defines intellectual imperialism as "the domination of one people by another in their world of thinking."[18] He contends that intellectual imperialism has six main characteristics:

[18] Alatas, "Intellectual Imperialism."

1. **Exploitation**: peripheral societies provide raw data for the central ones, and these process and manufacture them in the form of books and articles.
2. **Tutelage**: the knowledge produced and consumed in the peripheries is assumed to be dependent on the knowledge produced by central societies.
3. **Conformity**: people working in the peripheries are compelled to adhere to theories produced by imperialist societies.
4. **Uneven division of intellectual work**: When they collaborate on academic projects, scholars from peripheral societies work in secondary roles. For instance, they provide raw data from their countries for comparative studies.
5. **Rationalization**: Imperialism justifies itself as a civilizing mission.
6. **Mediocrity**: Most often, scholars from the central societies who work in the colonies are not among the central societies' most brilliant.

But how does intellectual imperialism work? A vast literature has described how, after the end of World War II, the United States exerted intellectual imperialism worldwide.[19] The United States took advantage of the poor conditions in Western Europe to become the new intellectual hegemon. Not only did the United States replace the Western European colonial powers as the main intellectual reference for the majority world,[20] but it exerted growing influence on Western Europe, too. Naturally, this process did not happen overnight.

"Philanthropic foundations" exerted a central role in this process. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, they have been key actors in US intellectual development.[21] After World War II, they expanded the scope of their actions worldwide. They distribute

[19] Robert F. Arnove, ed., *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980); Teresa Hayler, *Aid as Imperialism* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1971); and Inderjeet Parmar, "The Big 3 Foundations and American Global Power," *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 74, no. 4 (2015).

[20] The concept of majority world was first presented by Shahidul Alam, as a manner to refer to the societies existing beyond the Western World. Contrary

large amounts of money to scholars and intellectuals to stimulate research on certain topics, using certain theoretical perspectives and methodologies.[22] By doing this, they exert a tremendous influence on setting the agenda of the intellectual debate.

The academic infrastructure providing the United States with an enormous advantage in setting the agenda of the global intellectual debate has grown in sophistication since the 1990s. After the demise of the Soviet Union and the Central and Eastern European regimes associated with it, the United States became the uncontested leader of a unipolar global order. Acting together with international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the United States promoted the setting of a new global order based on neoliberal principles.[23]

A concrete consequence of this move was the restructuring of the entire logic of international scholarship around the principles of academic capitalism.[24] According to these principles, academic institutions must compete for resources to sustain teaching and research based on their efficiency. A global academic ranking system provides the basis for measuring that efficiency. The United States controls most of the ranking institutions, and unsurprisingly, its academic institutions and scholars occupy the most important positions in these rankings. Other western Anglophone countries also benefit from this system.[25] Beyond this there is a series of unspoken rules that minimize the chances of scholars working from the Global South being published in the "world class" journals and having their work cited, among other aspects.[26]

This structural advantage provides the United States with the power to "universalize particularisms linked to its singular historical tradition."[27] This has allowed the United States to exert huge normative influence over the rest of the world. In this scenario, the US institutions become the model to follow. Very often, the ruling elites of other countries are educated and socialized in US universities.[28] In the process, they learn to look at the world and their own societies through US lenses.[29]

Media Imperialism

The debate on media imperialism originated in the 1960s in Latin America. There are concrete reasons for this to happen. Being considered the US's backyard, Latin America was the first region of the world to fully experience the power of US media imperialism. During World War II, the United States began to employ its media power as a resource for exerting diplomatic influence on Latin American countries. For Latin Americans, cultural imperialism was a matter of

to the perception implied by western-centered approaches and terminologies, these societies comprise the majority of humankind. By calling attention to this demographic reality, Alam's term highlights absurdity of a status quo in which a very small fraction of the human population presents itself as representing the highest values of the humankind as a whole. See Shahidul Alam, "Majority World: Challenging the West's Rhetoric of Democracy," *Amerasia Journal* 34, no. 1: 87–98.

[21] Parmar, "The Big 3 Foundations."

[22] Bruce Cumings, "Boundary Displacement: Area Studies and International Studies during and after the Cold War," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 29, no. 1 (1997).

[23] John Williamson, "A Short History of the Washington Consensus," in *The Washington Consensus Reconsidered: Towards a New Global Governance*, ed. Narcis Serra and Joseph E. Stiglitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

[24] Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism and the New Economy: Markets, State and Higher Education* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

[25] Aalbers, "Creative Destruction"; and Albuquerque, "The Institutional Basis."

[26] Paula Chakravartty et al., "#CommunicationSoWhite," *Journal of Communication* 68, no. 2 (2016); and Marton Demeter, *Academic Knowledge Production and the Global South* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2020).

[27] Bourdieu and Wacquant, "On the Cunning of the Imperialist Reason."

[28] Marion Fourcade, "The Construction of a Global Profession: The Transnationalization of Economics," *American Journal of Sociology* 112, no. 1 (2006).

[29] Yves Dezalay and Bryant G. Garth, *The Internationalization of Palace Wars: Lawyers, Economists and the Contest to Transform Latin American States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

activism rather than mere intellectual interest. They reacted to what they perceived as a threat to their native cultures posed by a foreign agent.[30]

The initial debate on media imperialism drew on dependency theory. Dependency theory emerged as a critical response to the US-promoted modernization theory, a theoretical standpoint that privileged the United States as a model for the development of societies belonging to the majority world.[31] Many of these societies had until recently been colonies of European countries. According to modernization theory, these societies (rebranded as underdeveloped or developing societies) should follow the script prescribed by the United States to develop.[32] Otherwise, for dependency theory, the main consequence of the policies proposed by modernization theory is an increasing dependence of majority world societies on the West. According to Latin American critics, the massive export of US media content to the majority world was a tool for producing cultural dependency.

The early debate on media imperialism was not limited to the academic milieu. Indeed, the activism in which Latin American intellectuals engaged, together with colleagues from the entire world, had practical results.[33] Ultimately, it led UNESCO's MacBride Commission to publish a document proposing a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). The US government and media reacted angrily and left UNESCO in protest against the NWICO proposals.[34] In the following decades, the debate on media imperialism lost much of the visibility it had achieved. Several factors contributed to this decline. First, the consolidation of the new system of international scholarship—described above—contributed to erasing Latin American voices in favor of US and Anglophone ones.[35] This means the authority to speak about media imperialism was transferred to scholars working in the very same countries that the Latin American intellectuals accused of perpetrating media imperialism. In other words, the emerging neoliberal system of intellectual imperialism had a decisive impact on the debate around media imperialism.

Although the initial focus of Anglophone studies on media imperialism was closer to that of its Latin American counterparts—this is the case of the work of Herbert Schiller,[36] for instance—it soon followed its own path. Progressively, studies on media imperialism began to emphasize the inequality in the production of media content in the international arena,[37] to the detriment of the idea that media imperialism is a particular aspect of a more general phenomenon.

Moreover, as we have seen, the United States at that time was rapidly becoming the unipolar hegemon of the world. In other words, US imperialism reached its peak as it became able to force

[30] Dorfman and Mattelart, *Para leer al Pato Donald*; and Luis Ramiro Beltrán, "TV Etchings in the Minds of Latin Americans: Conservative, Materialism, and Conformism," *International Communication Gazette* 24, no. 1 (1976).

[31] Peter Simonson, Jefferson Pooley, and David W. Park, "The History of Communication Studies Across the Americas: A View from the United States," *MATRIZes* 17, no. 3 (2023).

[32] Zaheer Baber, "Modernization Theory and the Cold War," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 31, no. 1 (2001).

[33] Florencia Enghel and Martín Becerra, "Here and There: (Re)Situating Latin America in International Communication Theory," *Communication Theory* 28, no. 2 (2018).

[34] Abu Bhuyan, *Internet Governance and the Global South: A Demand for a New Framework* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

[35] Albuquerque, "The Institutional Basis."

[36] Schiller, *Mass Communications and the American Empire*.

[37]

Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism."

other countries to adopt neoliberal reforms. These reforms in turn shaped different aspects of their societies: economy,[38] law,[39] political organization,[40] and no less importantly, the academic milieu.[41]

Therefore, it is no surprise that, at that time, speaking about imperialism was not a popular topic. Instead, new intellectual models emerged to provide intellectual justification for the US-centered global order. One of the most influential ideologues of this new order was Joseph Nye, Jr. In a book affirming that the United States was "bound to lead" the global order, he coined the concept of "asymmetrical interdependence" to describe the new global order.[42] This logic also made its mark on studies of media imperialism. In fact, Joseph Straubhaar borrowed from Nye the concept of "asymmetrical interdependence" to justify why "media imperialism" was not a useful concept anymore.[43] His core argument is that, in the last few decades, numerous countries have begun to export their media products, too. A core example refers to Brazil's Rede Globo de Televisão (Globo Television Network), which exported its telenovelas to other countries with considerable success.

What this argument loses sight of is that, contrary to what happened to the United States, the export of media products was not an expression of pre-existing patterns of imperialistic dominance. There is a rich literature on how Hollywood has systematically echoed the US political agenda in their depictions of the military, for instance.[44] Added to this, the United States has often used economic and political pressure to force other countries to open their markets for US-produced media content.[45] The manner in which the United States dealt with the NWICO document provides vivid evidence in this respect. To be sure, nothing similar happened in other countries.

Recently, there has been a new wave of attention regarding media imperialism, specifically with reference to "platform imperialism."[46] It is worth pointing out that platforms and media are not exactly the same thing, and that digital media (originally described as "the internet") originated not only as a US project but as a US military project. The entire infrastructure of global digital media is centered on the United States. This strategic advantage allowed US platforms to quasi-monopolize the exchange of messages online.

Intellectual Imperialism Meets Media Imperialism

As we have seen, debates on intellectual imperialism and media imperialism have mostly run in parallel. Each one explores the problem of cultural imperialism from a different angle. I argue that, to understand the current dynamics of cultural imperialism, we must consider

[38] Fourcade, "Construction of a Global Profession."

[39] Alvaro Santos, "The World Bank's Uses of the 'Rule of Law' Promise in Economic Development," in *New Law and Economic Development: A Critical Appraisal,* ed. David. M. Trubek and Alvaro Santos (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[40] Michael Christensen, "Interpreting the Organizational Practices of North American Democracy Assistance," *International Political Sociology* 11, no. 2 (2017).

[41] Slaughter and Rhoades, *Academic Capitalism.*

[42] Straubhaar, "Beyond Media Imperialism."

[43] Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

[44] Stacy Takacs, "The US Military as Cold War Programmer," *Journal of Popular Culture* 50, no. 3 (2017).

[45] Paul Moody, "Embassy Cinema: What WikiLeaks Reveals about US State Support for Hollywood," *Media, Culture & Society* 39, no. 7 (2017).

[46] Jin, *Digital Platforms.*

both at the same time. There are many examples of the interplay between intellectual imperialism and media imperialism. Here, I intend to explore a specific case: the use of the academic apparatus as a resource for socializing media personnel of other countries into the values and professional culture of the imperialist culture.

Recently, a professor working at the Center for Sustainable Democracy at the University of South Florida published a post on LinkedIn commemorating that his center received a $150,000 grant for training Brazilian journalists.[47] The sponsor of that grant was the US Department of State, through the US Embassy and Consulates in Brazil. The obvious question is: why should a country provide professional training for native journalists from other countries? The most remarkable aspect of this initiative is that it is not exceptional. Indeed, several similar initiatives have occurred in Brazil and many other countries.

In the last four decades, exporting democracy and offering media assistance have been common motifs in the US's strategy to exert influence on other countries. The landmark of this initiative was the launch of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) in 1983. NED has founded "democracy promotion" initiatives around the world. It must be noted that NED defines "democracy promotion" in a very broad manner.[48] In Brazil, NED has provided resources for groups championing progressive political values but also for ultra-conservative groups that supported the former far-right president Jair Bolsonaro.[49] This indicates that, more than supporting specific political causes, NED attempts to control the entire scope of Brazilian politics.

Recently, some initiatives have blended elements of intellectual imperialism and media imperialism. They profit from the structural advantages that the global scholarship schema offers to the United States as an instrument to shape acquiescent media elites in other countries. The Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, located at the University of Texas at Austin, provides an excellent example in this regard. The University of Texas has a reputation as a center of excellence in Latin American studies. The reasons behind this reputation go beyond the quality of the researchers working at the university. The massive investments that US universities receive make it impossible for universities located in other countries to compete with them.[50] The University of Texas, for instance, can afford the exorbitant prices of the books published by commercial publishers (such as Routledge, Taylor and Francis, and others), while the universities located in the majority world cannot. A recent study found that the University of Texas counted ninety-two editorial board members in communication journals included on the Journal of Citation

[47] https://www.linkedin.com/posts/jscacco_democracy-technology-futureofnews-activity-7122591167690457088-RRfZ.

[48] Christensen, "Interpreting the Organizational Practices."

[49] Camila Felix Vidal and Jahde Lopez, "(Re)pensando a dependência latino-americana: Atlas Network e institutos parceiros no governo Bolsonaro," *Revista Brasileira de Ciência Política* 38 (2022).

[50] Afonso de Albuquerque, "Towards a Multipolar Communication International Scholarship?" *World of Media: Journal of Russian Media and Journalism Studies* 1, no. 2 (2023).

Reports sample. This is more than double the number of editorial board members from all Latin American and Caribbean countries together. Concretely, this gives the University of Texas the power to speak about Latin America with more authority than Latin American scholars themselves.[51]

In particular, the scholars affiliated with the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas write extensively about Latin American journalism, but they rarely cite authors working in Latin America. This geographic exclusion persists even though most of these scholars are proficient in Spanish and Portuguese and therefore have access to the scholarly literature published by scholars working in Latin America. Still more important, a growing number of scholars working in Latin America have published in "prestige" international journals. Nonetheless, the practice of disregarding items published by authors working outside Anglophone (and other Western) universities is very common across communication studies and in other fields as well.[52]

What makes the Knight Center's case particularly interesting is that the tactic of silencing local scholars' voices is coupled with the intention of exerting technical (and political) influence over the countries where these scholars live. After all, the core purpose of the Knight Center is to provide journalism education for societies that already have their own journalism courses. The first logical step to justify this intention is to deny importance to the education and research institutions existing in those societies. Offering courses for journalists and students living in Latin America is just one of the means that the Knight Center employs to achieve its ends. The play of imperial influence is furthered by strategic networking, which refers to systematic initiatives aiming to prepare local media elites to be attuned to the values and viewpoints of the United States. One way it has done this is by sponsoring professional associations designed to operate in other countries.

The Brazilian investigative journalism association Associação Brasileira de Jornalismo Investigativo (ABRAJI) provides a good illustration of this principle. It was created in 2002 under the auspices of the Knight Center. Since then, it has acquired growing influence as a journalistic (and political) agent in Brazil. For instance, in the mid-2010s, ABRAJI actively promoted the idea that journalism was a key factor in fighting corruption. At that time, the Brazilian media was engaged in a political campaign against the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, hereafter PT). Politically biased accusations of corruption were a central part of this campaign. Indirectly, at least, ABRAJI provided support for this strategy. ABRAJI has also worked as a representative association for Brazilian journalists, in addition to

[51] Afonso de Albuquerque et al., "Structural Limits to the De-Westernization of the Communication Field: The Editorial Board in Clarivate's JCR System," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 13, no. 2 (2020).

[52] See, for instance, Ana C. Suzina, "English as Lingua Franca: On the Sterilization of Scientific Work," *Media, Culture & Society* 43, no. 1 (2021); and Mohan Dutta et al., "Decolonizing Open Science: Southern Interventions," *Journal of Communication* 71, no. 5 (2021).

FENAJ (Federação Nacional dos Jornalistas), the Brazilian journalists' union.

Since 2018, ABRAJI has played a pivotal role as an organizer of multi-stakeholder initiatives aiming to fight disinformation. The most known example in this respect is the Comprova Project. The model for Comprova was the US First Draft project, which integrated universities, news media, civil society organizations, and platforms in a media coalition. ABRAJI was one of the founders of Comprova, with the financial support of the Facebook Journalistic Project (now Meta) and Google News Initiative, several news media outlets (both legacy and native digital vehicles), and fact-checking agencies.[53] Comprova has served as a truth-certifying system, which legitimizes some actors to the detriment of others. Essentially, ABRAJI works as an intermediary between US interests and the Brazilian journalistic community. There are numerous examples in this respect. For instance, ABRAJI sponsored a course on investigative journalism to be offered to Brazilian journalists in association with the US Embassy.[54]

[53] Salvador Strano, "Projeto Comprova reúne 24 veículos contra a fake news," *Meio & Mensagem*, June 19, 2018.

[54] US Mission Brazil, "U.S. Embassy and Abraji Open Enrollment for Investigative Journalism Course," US Embassy & Consulates in Brazil, July 20, 2023, https://br.usembassy.gov/pt/embaixada-dos-eua-e-abraji-abrem-inscricoes-para-curso-de-jornalismo-investigativo/.

Cultural Imperialism in Practice: The Lava Jato Operation

Started in 2014, the Lava Jato Judicial Operation provides a dramatic example of US interference in Brazilian politics,[55] with disastrous consequences for Brazil. The PT and its political allies in general, and former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in particular, were the main targets of Lava Jato investigations. Judge Sergio Moro and Prosecutor Deltan Dallagnol led the Lava Jato investigations. Both had solid ties with US agencies such as the Department of State and the FBI.[56]

[55] Natália Viana, Andrew Fishman, and Maryam Saleh, "Como a Lava Jato escondeu do governo federal visita do FBI e procuradores americanos," *Agência Pública/Intercept Brasil*, March 12, 2020.

[56] Viana, Fishman, and Saleh, "Como a Lava Jato."

The legacy media fully supported Lava Jato.[57] They provided massive coverage for Lava Jato and teamed with Judge Moro and the prosecutors to leak information provided by them with the purpose of damaging PT's and Lula's public image, making it easier for the prosecutors to convict him. Lava Jato succeeded in destabilizing the PT-led government. In 2016, President Dilma Rousseff left the presidency after an impeachment process, and in 2017, Judge Moro convicted Lula, sentencing him to a twelve-year term in prison under corruption allegations. A news piece published by the newspaper *O Globo* was the main evidence for convicting Lula. This news item prominently featured the allegation that Lula privileged the Odebrecht construction company in exchange for renovations to a three-story apartment he had bought. Later, it was proved that Lula never acquired such an apartment.[58]

[57] Mads Damgaard, "Cascading Corruption News: Explaining the Bias of Media Attention to Brazil's Political Scandals," *Opinião Pública* 24, no. 1 (2018); Liziane Guazina, Helder Prior, and Bruno Araújo, "Framing of a Brazilian Crisis: Dilma Rousseff's Impeachment in National and International Editorials," *Journalism Practice* 13, no. 5 (2019); Francisco P. J. Marques, Camila Mont'Alverne, and Isabele Mitozo, "Editorial Journalism and Political Interests: Comparing the Coverage of Dilma Rousseff's Impeachment in Brazilian Newspapers," *Journalism* 22, no. 11 (2021); and Teun A. van Dijk, "How Globo Media Manipulated the Impeachment of Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff," *Discourse & Communication* 11, no. 2 (2017).

Despite the fragility of the evidence against him, Lula was sent to jail in 2018 and prevented from running in the presidential elec-

[58] Emilio P. N. Meyer, "Judges and Courts Destabilizing Constitutionalism: The Brazilian Judiciary Branch's Political and Authoritarian Character," *German Law Journal* 19, no. 4 (2018).

tion that year. ABRAJI, undeterred by this faulty judicial process, provided full support to the legacy media coverage of Lava Jato, presenting it as quality investigative journalism. In fact, the association's vice president, Vladimir Netto, published a book praising Judge Moro as a national hero. His book served as the basis for a Netflix series—*The Mechanism*—released in 2018, the year of the Brazilian presidential election. Lava Jato and the legacy media coverage of it fostered a climate of generalized suspicion regarding institutional politics.[59] Ultimately, this created the conditions that allowed the far-right candidate Jair Bolsonaro to become the Brazilian president after a surprising victory in 2018.

But how does the cultural imperialism framework proposed in this article help us understand how foreign powers (the United States, especially) meddled in Brazilian judicial and political affairs? Intellectual imperialism was a key element of Lava Jato, as it ultimately provided the rationale for it. The intellectual roots of Lava Jato lie in the literature that, from a neoliberal perspective, describes corruption as a major threat to democracy. The World Bank and Transparency International have been the main intellectual sources of scholarly discourse on corruption, understood as "the private abuse of a public office."[60] This agenda came to exert tremendous influence in political science and law studies. In Brazil, this literature helped to consolidate a view that emphasized the so-called accountability institutions as being central to a "good democracy" at the expense of representative politics.[61] This view was significant in that it provided legitimacy to the idea that Lava Jato would purge the sins of representative politics—especially those associated with the PT government.

Still more important, US institutions had played a central role in training Brazilian law officials on the anticorruption agenda.[62] In fact, their interference in Brazilian politics went far beyond that. US universities and scholars actively promoted Lava Jato as a revolutionary event in the history of Latin American justice: the most significant anticorruption operation in Latin American history.[63] Numerous academic works promoted this idea, and US scholars guided Moro on visits to US universities.[64] Notre Dame University provided Moro with the Notre Dame Award in 2017 and an honorary PhD title in the following year.[65]

Intellectual imperialism was not the only dimension of cultural imperialism influencing Lava Jato. In fact, it merged with media imperialism in the promotion of the anticorruption agenda. ABRAJI was instrumental in this regard, as it helped to legitimize a political campaign against Lula and PT as quality journalism. This is recognized by association itself. In fact, they contend that ABRAJI was part

[59] Nahuel Ribke, "Netflix and Over the Top Politics? The *Mechanism* TV Series and the Dynamics of Entertainment Intervention," *Critical Studies on Television* 16, no. 1 (2021).

[60] Williamson, "A Short History."

[61] See, for instance, Timothy J. Power and Matthew M. Taylor, eds., *Corruption and Democracy in Brazil* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

[62] See Eduardo M. Menuzzi and Fabiano Engelmann, "Elites jurídicas e relações internacionais: Wilson Center e agenda anticorrupção no judiciário brasileiro," *Conjuntura Astral* 11, no. 54 (2020).

[63] See, for instance, Luciano Da Ros and Matthew M. Taylor, *Brazilian Politics on Trial: Corruption and Reform under Democracy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2022);
Paul Lagunes and Jan Svejnar, eds., *Corruption and the Lava Jato Scandal in Latin America* (New York: Routledge, 2021).

[64] Fausto Macedo, "Moro e Carmen falam de Lava Jato e Corrupção na Universidade Colúmbia," *Blog do Fausto Macedo*, *Estado de São Paulo*, February 4, 2017.

[65] JusBrasil (website), "Juiz Federal Sérgio Moro recebe Título de Doutor Honoris Causa da University of Notre Dame," *JusBrasil*, May 21, 2018.

of a Latin American network organized around Lava Jato.[66] Vladimir Netto, who served as vice president of ABRAJI from 2016 to 2017 was the author of a book that presented Judge Sergio Moro in very favorable terms.[67] In 2020, a news series published by *Intercept Brasil* showed evidence that Netto and other journalists colluded with Lava Jato prosecutors to release public information favorable to Lava Jato.

[66] Catalina Lobo-Guerrero, "How Lava Jato Brought Together Latin America's Investigative Journalists," *Global Investigative Journalism Network*, August 14, 2019.

[67] Vladimi Netto, *Lava Jato: o juiz Sergio Moro e os bastidores da operação que abalou o Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro: Sextante, 2016).

Conclusion

This article sheds new light on the debate about cultural imperialism. Historically, scholars have employed this term to describe two different phenomena: intellectual imperialism and media imperialism. They have been explored by two academic traditions, which rarely find dialogue with each other. Taking a different approach, this article suggests that intellectual and media imperialism are complementary aspects of a more general phenomenon. By taking these two aspects together, it identifies the original dynamics of media imperialism, which differ significantly from those identified by the classical approach. At present, scholars mostly associate media imperialism with the mechanisms allowing imperialistic countries to inundate other countries with their media content. In this article, we explore a different strategy, which is one that takes advantage of intellectual imperialism. It works by educating the local media elite and journalists in accordance with the worldview and interests of the imperialistic countries. Added to this, it employs networks that consolidate and diffuse foreign practices and models among local journalists.

To illustrate how this logic works, this article analyzes the interplay between intellectual imperialism and media imperialism. In particular, it discusses the role that the Knight Center for Journalism in the Americas, an institution located at the University of Texas, has played as an organizer of Brazilian journalists. For instance, the Knight Center was one of the sponsors of the creation of ABRAJI, the Brazilian investigative journalism association. The article takes the Lava Jato episode as a concrete example of how intellectual imperialism and media imperialism impacted Brazilian politics. As the Brazilian case demonstrates, scholarly research and education frequently operate as tools at the service of imperialistic interests.

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