revista Eptic
v. 28, n. 2, maio-ago., 2026
ISSN: 1518-2487

Media Imperialism, Labor, and Artificial Intelligence: An Interview with Toby Miller

Jonas C. L. Valente

Professor at the Federal University of Ceará (UFC) and the IESB University Center. He was a postdoctoral researcher at the Oxford Internet Institute, where he was responsible for co-leading the Cloudwork Project at the Fairwork Foundation. He earned his PhD in Sociology from the University of Brasília (UnB) in 2019. His doctoral dissertation examined digital platforms and received an honorable mention in the UnB Dissertation Award. He is the author of *From Online Platforms to Digital Monopolies* (Dialética, 2021). He is co-editor-in-chief of the journal *Eptic*.

Fabrício Zanghelini

PhD in Economics from Fluminense Federal University (UFF). Collaborating professor and postdoctoral researcher in the Professional Graduate Program in Economics at the Federal University of Sergipe (PROPEC/UFS), as part of the "Economic Governance of Digital Networks" project, with support from grant #2026/04912-4, São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP).

Farooq Sulehria

Research affiliate at Södertörn University in Stockholm. He also teaches at Beaconhouse National University in Lahore. He is the author of *Media Imperialism in India and Pakistan* (Routledge). He has edited and co-edited the following books: *75 Years After Partition: India, Pakistan and Bangladesh* (Routledge); *Media Subimperialisms and the Rise of the Global South* (Palgrave Macmillan); and *Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Strategic Relations in the Twenty-First Century* (Palgrave Macmillan).

Creative Commons **Atribuição** **Não comercial** **Compartilha igual**

https://br.creativecommons.net/licencas/

1. In view of the radical technological innovations whereby social media have also become very important alongside the legacy media, do you think the media imperialism thesis needs a revision? Also, how do you see the new theoretical and conceptual frameworks of digital/data imperialism in relation to media imperialism?

A. Ideas of media imperialism have been subject to revision from day one, thanks to the febrile imagination, activism, and scholarly innovation of people such as the Schillers, the Mattelarts, Richard Maxwell, Burçe Celik, Joe Straubhaar, Shinjoung Yeo, Nicole Cohen, Tanner Mirrlees, Núria Almiron, Kristina Riegert, Vincent Mosco, Jeremy Tunstall, Mehdi Semati, Rune Ottosen, Joan Pedro Caraña, Oliver Boyd-Barrett, Jessica Retis, Faye Ginsburg, Leslie Regan Shade, Silvio Waisbord, John Nguyet Erni, Anthony Fung, Audrey Yue, Maria Pramaggiore, Jack Qiu, Koichi Iwabuchi, Dal Yong Jin, Daya Thussu, Catherine McKercher, John Sinclair, and Michael Curtin (in the Global North) and Farooq Sulehria, Ravi Sundaram, Néstor García Canclini, Ranjani Mazumdar, Salvador Leetoy, Alejandra Castaña Echeverri, César Bolaño, George Yúdice, Nancy Gómez, Helena Martins, María José Pantoja Peschard, Marwan Kraidy, André Dorce Ramos, Carla Pinochet Cobos, Daniel Mato, Olga Sorzano, Daniela Inés Monje, and Paola Ricaurte Quijano in the Global South, to name but a few. The original ideas derived from resistance to inequalities in telecommunications, journalism, and screen drama in the 1970s. They remain useful. Today's arguments re digital or data imperialism often need a stronger sense of intellectual and activist history in order to avoid reinventing things, as was the case with so much work on digital games. Look back at the parents of the thesis and its subsequent refiners—they knew what they were doing.

2. We see a decolonial turn in media and data studies in which data colonialism is sometimes used interchangeably or intertwined with digital imperialism. How do you see the relations and distinctiveness of these two concepts?

A. I think the urge to decolonize is extremely valuable, but I am tired of people in the Global North, whatever their origin, lecturing about this. Stay silent and just listen to the Global South; you are not the vanguard. Stop it! Publish in relevant languages and live, work, and survive on Global South money, activism, and theory. Then talk. Enough just now from cozy enclaves.

3. You have been investigating forms of media imperialism from the perspective of New International Division of Cultural Labour (NICL). How does NICL is different in the case of social media and age of digital platforms as compared to the period when legacy media was the only game in town?

A. Thank you for your interest in this notion! I know what you're saying, I think! Here's the deal. Last year, the most visited news source on Facebook was the China Global Television Network, with 125 million people tuned in—none in China, where Facebook is banned. On TikTok, Saudi Arabia attracted the second-largest international following for its "journalism," behind only the equally egregious *Daily Mail*. And so-called influencers played a significant role in the 2024 US general election. Around 500 of them have more than 100,000 followers each. Mostly men, they generally lack journalistic training or experience and hold the profession in contempt. More than a third of US voters under 30, and a fifth of the total population, consult these influencers, usually via TikTok, and consider them reliable narrators. I think those numbers mean international labor still matters, and geopolitical power, too. Meanwhile, how was the new hit film *The Odyssey* made? With unsuspecting taxpayers' money from all over the globe, Athens to Sydney and back again—and on controversially contested imperial "Moroccan" land, without indigenous permission. So the NICL needs critique and refinement, but it remains relevant—to me at least! It helps explain how work functions, citizens are

exploited, and territory occupied.

4. It may be too early to say, however, the element of Artificial Intelligence (AI) will most likely to factor in any future debate on NIDCL and media imperialism. How do you view AI's advent in relation to NICL?

A. This is a crucial question. Colombian and Philippines workers enter crucial AI data for US corporations at $1.50 an hour. Meanwhile, public subvention around the globe is part of what allows US-based corporations to build their energy-sucking, water-depleting data centers. These aspects–seeking cheap labor and using gullible governments' funds–lie at the heart of the NICL, and AI.

5. While the US domination of legacy media remains rather unchallenged despite the rise of BRICS media, the USA also dominates in the realm of digital platforms. Social media platforms (Facebbok) to search engines (Google) to streaming platforms (Netflix) and mobilephone (iPhone) and computer hardware (Apple), US domination of infrastructure and software (Microsoft, Oracle) is unquestionable. Despite the relative decline as a result of BRICS' rise, how do you analyse the 'declinist' theory? Or is it the case, that the US power as an empire has relatively declined in the military and economic spheres but not cultural and ideological realms?

A. This is a vital and tough query, and I think you've answered it yourselves! In terms of the popular, the English language remains key beyond Anglo-dominant cultures, though in complex ways. It remains rather obscure for the popular classes worldwide, but powerful among the Global South and Global North middle and ruling classes, and dubbing is extensive. Economically and militarily, I think the US will recover from Republican folly, as it has done after successive failures by Administrations from that political party–Nixon, Reagan, the Bushes, and now the orange combover. While the dollar remains the crucial unit of exchange, US power will continue.

6. How real is BRICS media as a challenge to the US/Western domination and hegemony? Notably, we need to discuss China here. China is often presented as the main technological and geopolitical counterweight to the United States. To what extent does the rise of Chinese digital platforms and communication infrastructures challenge US and Western dominance in the global media system? Does it contribute to a more multipolar communication order, or does the structural asymmetry between the Global North and the Global South remain largely unchanged?

A. China conducts itself just like France or the US–as a blundering, unpleasant, solipsistic imperial power. Just look at the way it exploits natural resources in Latin America–horrendous. In terms of cultural exports, China's are of little interest beyond the diaspora. But its policy re AI is interesting and seems less parochial than the stance adopted by other power blocs. In terms of the BRICs more generally, remember this fiction/faction was constructed by Global North finance capital. There is minimal coordination between these entirely distinct societies. China and India matter as technological powerhouses and as reserve armies of labor, but in entirely different ways. Brazil functions more like other large Latin American economies, while South Africa is a relatively small player. Russia is important because of its military and extractive sector.

7. Until the 1980s, an important characteristic emphasized by the protagonists of the media imperialism thesis was, one way flow of information. With the so-called globalisation of media in the 1990s, national media markets witnessed mushrooming of radio and television channels as the state monopoly of the airwaves decisively ended. This led to provincialisation of discourses because national/local channels produced content aimed at specific audiences. The advent of social media further provincialized the debates and content. In view of these changes, can we still claim one way flow of information?

A. This again is a question that brilliantly provides its own answer. I agree with the direction taken, albeit with the proviso that major malign players (Russia, China, the US) see states and/or corporations using so-called social media in less tangible, overt ways than in the case of their commercial or public-service counterparts.

8. What about entertainment (music, film, video games). Is there still a one way flow? Has digitality compounded the entertainment imperialism?

A. Netflix in particular uses the NICL to fund an international imperium, via avowedly local screen drama and clandestinely global productions alike; both see taxpayers providing subvention to Hollywood. Of course, there are major Korean and Colombian musicians, for example, but singing in English, French, Arabic, or Spanish remains crucial to international success, English above all, and often with links to the old labels. Distribution has always been the key to success, which hasn't changed.

9. The question of environment has been neglected. While a repertoire on climate imperialism has emerged, of late, there are hardly any efforts to study media and communication industries from the perspective of climate and environment in the global South (Your own works including, Greening the Media, perhaps remain honourable exceptions). For instance, some of the countries have become sites for dumping the ICT waste. Your comments (especially in relation to Datacentres).

A. The United Nations has called for a halt to the expansion of data centers that power AI because they threaten water and energy resources. On average, these entities require about 55 gigawatts of energy, 28 million square meters of land, and vast amounts of water. Two years ago, so-called cloud computing consumed as much energy as Britain. The International Energy Agency predicts that within a decade, it will require as much as India. Furthermore, the technology industry's data-center frenzy is extracting water from some of the driest regions in the world to cool facilities. Google used six trillion gallons of water in 2024, a third of Turkey's drinking water supply. From 2020 to 2023, Google's CO_2 emissions grew 67%, Microsoft's 40%, primarily due to data centers. In 2024, data centers consumed as much energy as Sweden, and will double Germany's energy consumption next year. Water use for cooling could increase by 870% in the immediate future, along with the less direct use of water to generate power elsewhere and for software manufacturing. And we are seeing more and more of these centers in Chile (the driest of all countries), Mexico, and other parts of the Global South. Re electronic waste, bad actors such as India, the US, and China have dumped poisonous materials in vulnerable places where workers in the informal sector undertake perilous recycling. Like labor in general, environmental impacts of communications technologies should form the beating heart of media studies. They don't—much safer to discuss audience effects or textual features…

10. What role can national states and regional organizations play in confronting the power of global digital platforms? Can regulation, public digital infrastructures, and data-sovereignty policies reduce dependency, or are national governments increasingly subordinate to transnational technology corporations?

A. Bodies like the World Economic Forum, the World Bank, the OECD, and the IMF are appalling cheerleaders for AI, as are many regional associations, such as the Interamerican Development Bank and the EU. To the extent they favor intervention, it's either to encourage foreign investment and local corporations, or for states to "protect" children. Individual governments, by contrast, are more subject to activism—hence successful moratoria across the US and legal action in Chile to stop tec bros' intoxicated taste for data centers. The platforms must be subordinated to sovereignty, to democratic control, if our planet is to be protected.