

Pensando o Recolonial nos estudos da Comunicação: reflexões a partir da América Latina

Thinking the Recolonial in Communication Studies: reflections from Latin America

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Resumo: *A despeito do seu pioneirismo, a tradição de pensamento crítico latino-americano praticamente desapareceu do cenário da pesquisa internacional de referência, a partir da instauração de circuito anglófono, na década de 1990, centrado nos Estados Unidos. Este ensaio tem como objetivo discutir esse fenômeno no contexto de um processo mais amplo de recolonização, conduzido no âmbito da globalização neoliberal e do capitalismo acadêmico, com foco na pesquisa latino-americana nos estudos da Comunicação e nos circuitos de Comunicação Científica. Nesse contexto desfavorável, a América Latina soube preservar um circuito vigoroso de intercâmbio acadêmico, pautado no acesso aberto à produção intelectual. Sustenta-se que esse circuito pode servir de base para a construção de um espaço de circulação acadêmico global mais diversificado, alternativo ao atualmente existente.*

Palavras-chave: *Comunicação; América Latina; recolonização; globalização neoliberal; circuitos acadêmicos.*

Abstract: *Despite its pioneering spirit, the Latin American tradition of critical thinking has practically disappeared from the international research scene of reference, since the establishment of an English-speaking circuit in the 1990s, centred in the United States. This issue discusses this phenomenon in the context*

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of a broader process of recolonization, conducted within the scope of neoliberal globalization and academic capitalism, with a focus on Latin American research in the studies of Communication and in circuits of Science Communication. In this unfavorable context, Latin America was able to preserve a vigorous academic exchange circuit, based on open access to intellectual production. We sustain this circuit can serve as a basis for the construction of a more diversified global space of academic circulation, an alternative to the current one.

Keywords: *Communication; Latin America; recolonization; neoliberal globalization; academic circuits.*

Introduction

*We will coup whoever we want.
Deal with it!"*

The shameless confession of the South African mogul raised in the United States Elon Musk, about his participation in Bolivia's military coup that took down president elect Evo Morales and replaced him for a regimen that were more friendly to his own interests, comprise an aspect as important as it is neglected of the contemporary political situation: a process of accelerated recolonization of peripheral countries, in the wake of a neoliberal process of globalization. Another example, even closer, is regarding the role that United States institutions played in the dynamic of the Brazilian crisis, which led to president Dilma Rousseff's impeachment – which a considerable number of authors have described as a coup (ALBUQUERQUE, 2019; SANTOS, 2018) –, to the arrest of former president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and the rise of Jair Bolsonaro – whose main political agenda seem to be putting the economic and political system of the country to the disposal of the United States.

How have academic literature been reacting to those events? In a shy manner, at best. Numberless appeals have been made around the need of “de-westernize” communication research (WAISBORD, MEL-LADO, 2016; DEMETER, 2019; CURRAN; PARK, 2000), but do they contribute to understanding the dilemmas presented to peripheral countries of neoliberal globalism? This article explores the potential of Latin American perspectives to deal with the dilemmas presented in the contemporary world from a perspective that highlights the circuits of production and distribution of the academic knowledge. In other words, we argue that in the academic context it doesn't matter only what was said, but who said it, in what outlets this theory is shared and by which institutions the knowledge is legitimated as academically relevant.

Through this point of view, the article sustains that: 1) a solid tradition of investigation on Communication has been constituted in Latin America in the second half of the last century; 2) this tradition preceded

in decades the research of other parts of the world (including Europe) on the theme, and has constituted itself as a critical counterpoint to studies developed in the United States; 3) Latin America was capable of developing a strong network of events and open access publications; 4) despite this pioneering aspect, Latin American production has lost relevance in the global scenario in the 1990's. We argue that such loss of relevance is not primordially due to the nature of research performed in the region or its quality, but due to the change of criteria that began to define the global through a fundamentally English-speaking gaze (American in particular), based in the globalization of the “academic capitalism” model.

This model, based in academic rankings (of educational institutions, scientific publications), usually produced by institutions headquartered in the United States, build the base that allow strongly ethnocentric models to claim a universal statute. Well, this is, precisely, a dynamic of post-colonial inheritance as it was identified by authors such as Mignolo (2007), for instance. In other words, the own structure of circulation of academic knowledge in the globe, established from the end of last century, has, in itself, re-colonial consequences. Initiatives of explicit recolonization, such as the ones we previously described, find in the academic field a space of a much more subtle legitimation, goes through the legitimation of places and specific forms of saying at the expense of others.

On the other hand, the unipolar global order, that worked as a base for this model, experiences today a major crisis. In this context, the pioneering experience of Latin America can work as an example and inspiration, both referring to their critical tradition (the so-called “Latin American communicational thinking”) and the circuit of academic exchange constituted in the region, working as a model for an alternative to the regimen of academic monoculture which defines what is a “quality” research in global terms. This essay, therefore, has the purpose of discussing these issues related to the academic circuit, seeking to bring the Latin American communicational thinking and the alternative circuits of open circulation about the scientific knowledge as models that not only break with western structures but also precede the international research agendas.

The Latin American perspective on Communication

The research on Communication has a well-established tradition in Latin American countries, which was developed way before Europe, in counterpoint to what was performed in the United States (HERSCOVITZ, 1995; TUFFE, 1996; BERGER, 1999). However, the dimension of its contribution was somehow lost in the scenario of contemporary global research. How and why did this happen? It is around this issue that were structured the current section and the next.

Unlike other fields, Communication was created as a distinctly American field and remain like that for decades. It emerged linked to the interests of military sectors, of intelligence and exterior relations of that country and with strong financial aid from it (GLANDER, 2000), around a fundamentally practical agenda, geared towards the establishment of mechanisms of social control. That strongly impacted in the configuration the field had in that country, not only in a political sense, but also in the theoretical and methodological sense, marked through an empiricist bias of behaviorist cutout and with a perspective that valued applied knowledge. Peters (1986) identified in the birthmarks of Communication Studies in the United States the reasons of the intellectual poverty that characterize them.

And what does Latin America have to do with it? It just so happens that critical perspectives socially based were already being developed systematically by the researchers of the region. Institutions like CIESPAL (Centro Internacional de Estudios Superiores de Comunicación para América Latina), created in 1959 in Ecuador, under the auspice of UNESCO (Aragão, 2018) and ALAIC (Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación) helped motivate an intellectual exchange between researchers of the region.

Both the premature development of research in Communication in the region and the critical perspective that characterize it are related to the same factor: the major influence that the United States had in Latin American culture and media in the period after World War II. That was perceived by certain sectors of Latin American societies as an example

of cultural imperialism (acc. BELTRAN, 1976). That influence has as guiding axis the ideology of developmentalism, which conceived the development as a one-way model, which would imply the abandonment of traditional bonds through a script that would go through economic liberalization (in other words, a market society), alphabetization, development of mass media and democracy (LERNER, 1958). Alternatively, Latin American critical researchers would perceive American mass media and the ideology of developmentalism as elements of oppression and alienation working for the cultural imperialism.

Different authors had a decisive role in the development of the tradition of Latin American critical thinking in Communication: Jesús Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini, Eliseo Verón, Renato Ortiz, José Marques de Melo and Luis Ramiro Beltrán are some of the most cited among them. In this text, however, we especially highlight a name whose importance in the global scenario is undisputable, but that, sometimes, has his role not as highlighted regarding his contribution for the Latin American perspective on communication: the Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire (FERNÁNDEZ-ABALLÍ ALTAMIRANO, 2016; SUZINA TUFTE, 2020). His pedagogy of the oppressed, which valued the autonomous construction of the student as subject of their own education, presents as one of the most important conceptual foundations the idea that the media should work as models of promotion of cultural diversity, consolidated in the so-called MacBride Report from UNESCO, published in 1980.

It was only in the 1980's that research of critical nature, with focus on social and cultural phenomena, gained relevance in the scenario of research in Communication in the United States. Ironically, what could be considered a success of the model of research developed in a pioneer manner in Latin America, marks a decline of the global expression of research of the region.

The decline of the Latin American gaze in the global English speaking order

The place of Latin American research in the global panorama of communication has considerably declined from the 1990's (ENGHEL;

BECERRA, 2018; GANTER; ORTEGA, 2019). Why did it occur? The decline of Latin America in the field of Communication is inseparable from a more extensive phenomenon: the construction, from the 1990's, of an English-speaking circuit, structured based on the principles of academic capitalism, economies based in knowledge and the construction of a system of global rankings (MUGNAINI; DIGIAMPIETRI; MENA-CHALCO, 2014). In summary, academic capitalism involves the organization of the mean around a logic of market competition, in the terms which the institutions and academic professionals are evaluated in terms of economic efficiency and compete for prestige and resources. In this logic of competition, academic rankings have a fundamental role. The issue here is: who defines what is quality production? As it occurred with other fields, in the wake of the process of neoliberal globalization, this role was, to a great extent, played by institutions hosted in the United States, and, secondarily, United Kingdom.

The power that results from this capacity of qualifying what constitutes "quality" academic production is illustrated by the system of classification of publications about their index of impact (in terms of citations). The crucial issue, here, is: what publications have their impact evaluated? What are their characteristics? A study recently published brings interesting clues in this sense (ALBUQUERQUE et al., 2020). Among the publications of Communication evaluated by the *Journal of Citation Reports*, by Clarivate, in 2017, all of them, except two, are published in English and most of them are published by only three commercial publishing companies and have paid access. Some of these publications have a marked geographic focus in Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania. Latin America is not contemplated by any publication of the list. The composition of the editorial staff of this sample of publications also tells an interesting story. Out of 4,784 members, no less than 2,798 (58.5%) of them are located in institutions in the United States and 398 (8.3%) in the United Kingdom. The so-called West has no less than 87.7% of the total of members of the editorial body, while countries like China and India have 32 and 10 members, respectively (in both cases, less than

one percent), and Latin America and the Caribbean, taken in a set, count with 50 (a little more than one percent).

The systemic invisibility that these regions have in the global scenario gets even more evident when we consider the representation that certain academic institutions got to obtain in the system: the University of Texas and the University of Wisconsin have, each one, 92 members on the list, almost double the amount of members from all the institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean together. In total, nine American academic institutions have more members in the system than the whole region put together.

Latin America disappeared from the system because its production was deemed invisible by the rules of the game. The so-called “internationalization” of communication took the character of global exportation of American research models, in such a way that the Latin American Contribution was simply ignored, crossed out from the map. It’s not that Latin America has stopped producing significant research, or that the quality has lowered; the research of the region was simply excluded from the circuit that began to define quality in global terms and was considered second-class.

Here we get to the core of the relation between academic politics installed in the last decades and what we call a process of recolonization. Having as object the historic context fairly different among themselves, Said (1996), Chakrabarty (2000) and Mignolo (2007) observe that one of the most important dimensions of the process of construction of superiority of western knowledge is the erasure of the historic contribution of other people to knowledge. What sets apart the process that we deal in this article from those described by these authors are their timing and the nature of the process of colonization that took place in one case and in the other. The colonizing process that we talk about here is associated to the neoliberal globalization that took place in the last quarter of the past century, headed by an alliance between the United States government and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which resulted in a brutal decrease of

national sovereignty of countries in different regions of the world – forced to adhere to neoliberal reforms under the threat of sanctions – and with particularly strict results for Latin America (BABB, 2013).

In this context, university institutions constitute a central piece for the legitimation of new relations of domination. They do so in two main forms: 1) building bonds of academic dependence between peripheral and central societies; 2) producing discourses that justify the new order and work as a base for public policies, that gain, thus, a global knowledge authority. The relations of academic dependence were carefully debated by authors such as Alatas, who, among other aspects, emphasizes the dimension of the global divide of the academic work (2003). Beyond that, the networks of relationship constituted through academic institutions of central countries play an important role in the formation of elites in peripheral societies (DEZALAY; GARTH, 2002).

This structure not only has a colonial structure in itself but produces recolonizing effects in its practical application to the concrete world. This model of academic work division played an important part in the re-structuration of the global order around the neoliberal recipe, as American university institutions took a central role regarding the economic debate (FOURCADE; OLLION; ALGAN, 2015). As the knowledge originated in these institutions began to base the actions of global institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, it ended up taking, pragmatically, a real value (BABB, 2013). Recent events in Latin America, previously referred in the introduction of this article, give a complementary dimension to the issue. For instance: the coup against Evo Morales was partly legitimated based on accusations of electoral fraud made by OEA – which later were denied – and, finally, Elon Musk, who sponsored the coup, called it by its name. Equally, the Operação Lava Jato, which decisively collaborated for the corrosion of the Brazilian democratic order, received a strong legitimation on the behalf of sectors of the American academic field, which portrayed it as a privileged example of virtuous work of accountability institutions of the legal universe and the media (LAGUNES; SVEJNAR, 2020).

The Global South: decolonization of discourse/ colonization of circuits?

After the fall of the Berlin Wall and consequently the sharp crisis of socialism in Eastern Europe and the economic opening in China, the world post-1990's has experienced the hegemony of capitalism as a predominant global economic system. Since then, the division between First, Second, and Third world started to no longer make sense for the world classification, since this definition "didn't have more theoretical or operational consistency, since the countries of the Second World (socialists) were converting into "Market Democracies" (VISENTINI, 2015, p. 7). As an alternative to the post-Cold War label of "Third World", such nations were later called Global South, representing a strategy of de-politization about the own world classification, and a discursive alignment on the transnational globalization of the 1990's, which reinforces the idea of existing an abyssal division (SANTOS, 2007) between colonizers and colonized.

It is in this scenario that the concept of Global South gets unfolded in the scientific circuit, initially traced through geographic and economic distinctions that distinguish countries of the north as developed and countries of the south as undeveloped, and later thematizing the border as a space of resistance to the logics of modernity, without leaving the nature of "being a fertile ground to those who wish to implement organizational, ideological or technological changes (CHASE-DUNN; HALL, 2016, p. 16).

In this economic context of globalization post-1990's, the Global South has become an important economic agenda under siege of neoliberal programs of structural adjustment of the World Bank (ANIEVAS; MATIN, 2016). In this period a globalized neoliberal agenda was imposed by the United States, known as Washington Consensus, which was a set of economic policies imposed to the countries in debt by the American financial institutions, which expanded in different spheres, including the educational and scientific (ALBUQUERQUE; LYCARIÃO, 2018). This project of dependence to central countries was implemented

through instruments of scientific politics of passive internationalization and by the importation of ideas, epistemologies, methodologies and technologies of central countries, in a movement where researchers of peripheral countries are motivated to serve as butlers to the hegemonic countries (BENNETT, 2014). In other words, they bring concepts and theories of central countries, translating to serve their peers, invisibilizing and subtracting epistemologies produced before in their own local communities, as if they never existed.

This erasure of local or regional epistemologies belongs to the dynamics of power maintenance of central countries over the “rest of the world”, through commercial control of circuits of publication and definitions of dominant agendas in circulation of knowledge. A search on research on the Global South in the platform Dimensions – search engine on publications, datasets, fomentations, patents and clinical tests – points towards important information so we can understand these research agendas that are consolidated about the theme. Among the main financers of research on Global South are international institutions like the European Union and the Council of economic and social research of England, and financial foundations such as the Ford Foundation, Wellcome Trust and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Words like poverty, underdevelopment, delay, deficiency, insecurity and vulnerability are among the propositions of training, emancipation and urgent help that the North needs to give the South (GRANT, 2015; MATTHEWS, ONYEMAOBI, 2020), without considering their own responsibility that the central countries have in global inequalities.

The relation of economic power and maintenance of power of central countries over non-western countries have also been observed in the field of Communication. Copean and Dingo (2018) observe how much the agenda directed towards race has been unfolded as a form of maintenance of power itself. The authors make an appeal so that white and western intellectuals be aware to the politics of capitalizing on the struggle and domination of non-white and/or exotified groups of the “Global South” that are being used as “interesting” case studies that

do not substantially change the dominant structure or even the scholar rhetoric of decolonization, that can inadvertently serve to sustain racist practices in the field. In the same train of thought, Mukherjee (2020) points towards such studies are reified from “ethnic garments” established by the own central countries, who define what non-westerns should wear: “The more exotic and adventure driven are the practices studied, the more enthusiastic will be their reception within the academic field”.

This form of domination on the knowledge, known as academic imperialism, was imposed as a civilizing process, put as a necessary step in human progress (ALATAS, 2000). In the current model of neoliberal globalization of the scientific circuit, the configuration of imperialism gets other outlines, and their recolonizing role gets more indirect (ALATAS, 2003). The control of informational flows of scientific communication remains under the dominion of central countries and big technologic oligopolies and the scientific publishing market (LARIVIÈRE; HAUSTEIN; MONGEON, 2015), basing themselves in the international laws of copyright and in a system of prestige over the circulation of knowledge (OLIVEIRA, 2019). This recolonization of science is marked, therefore, by the dominion of spaces of circulation of science, that has been challenged by different initiatives, among them are the production of Southern epistemologies, infrastructures and politics.

The resilience of the Latin American circuit and its contribution for a multipolar study of Communication

Despite the existence of highly lucrative circuits that are consolidated around the commercialization of the global scientific production and affect the representativity of peripheral and non-western countries in these spaces of scientific prestige, Latin American has historically constituted alternative models of circulation of scientific knowledge. As an example and model to be followed by “the rest of the world”, Latin America is considered one of the most progressive regions, not only

for its critical thinking marking the Latin American epistemological contribution, This Latin American forefront is also presented in the development of policies and infrastructures for an open access configured in sustainable models based in the institutional and state collaboration, cooperation and action that became an alternative to the logics of the neoliberal market on scientific knowledge.

Even before being an agenda for the rest of the world, such as cOAlition S, Open Access has been developed in the region since 1990's, with the *Scientific Electronic Library Online* (SciELO) launched in 1997, in addition to documents like the “*Declaración de San José hacia la Biblioteca Virtual en Salud*” (Declaration of San Jose with the Virtual Library in Health”, in 1998, for example. In other words, even before the Declaration of Budapest, published in 2002, which is considered a global milestone towards open access, Latin America has already been constituted as a model for initiatives of a free and equal access of science. In addition to SciELO and the Declaration of San José, other political initiatives and documents were fundamental for the definition of an alternative model of circulation of knowledge in the region. Among them, we can quote the “Declaration of Havana for the equal access to sanitary information”, in which is highlighted the responsibility of the State in the access of scientific information as a global public asset, reinforcing the importance of national and international politics to guarantee the wide circulation and access to science (COSTA; LEITE, 2016).

Another institution that marks the effort of the Latin America to build networks infrastructures and open access politics is Latindex, created in 1997, that has as central element the creation of a system of regional and cooperative character, distributed in different Latin American countries, consolidated through an understanding of sharing of work and the approximation among the sources that generate, provide and distribute data about publications. Another institution that has marked the Latin American action towards open access is Redalyc, a bibliographic database and a digital library of open access publications, also developed by the Universidade Autónoma do Estado do México. Created with the

purpose of giving visibility to Iberian American publications, in 2015, it also started to provide a system of information that evaluates the scientific and publishing quality of the knowledge in the region, producing bibliometric indicators about the impact of the publications, authors and countries including in the electronic publication of the library, beyond indicators of commercial companies like Clarivates and Scopus, who provide the Impact Factor and CiteScore, respectively. Currently, Redalyc is considered an important repository of knowledge, with over one thousand publications distributed throughout all Latin America.

Another initiative that stands out is Amelica, created in 2018, a communication infrastructure for scientific publication and open science, sustained cooperatively with a focus in the publishing model without lucrative goals to preserve the academic and open nature of scientific communication (BECERRIL-GARCÍA et al., 2018). It arrived in a regional context in which platforms, national councils of science, academic institutions and part of the academic community devalue local publications, aligning themselves with the strategies of commercial publishers. In the international context, it has been presented as an alternative to the platformization of science (MIROWSKI, 2018; OLIVEIRA, SOBREIRA, 2020), through its penetration of economic infrastructures and processes of digital platforms in scientific practices to attend demands around values of efficiency, visibility and productivity disguised by the discourse of transparency and acceleration by opening science. In this sense, Amelica is a publishing model without lucrative goals to preserve the academic and open nature of scientific communication as an “effort, born in the South and for the South, which is open to all publications in the world who work for an inclusive, equal and sustainable ecosystem of scientific communication”³.

Despite being a subject that already were being unfolded in an international level, it only recently became more visible with the publication of the Plan S of the European Union, which reinforces the vision already developed that the scientific information is a public asset and that

3 Available at: <http://amelica.org/index.php/pt/sobre-a-amelica/>.

open access is a path to allow this wide circulation of science. In Plan S, institutional politics were defined to provide subsidies for the publication in open access, among them the payment of article process charges, strengthening a market increasingly growing of monetization for open scientific knowledge. While Europe and the United States began to recognize open access as a modality even lucrative for their businesses, that were suffering with increasingly low access and different critiques from the academic community (JHA, 2012), Latin America not only had already discussed the theme decades ago, but integrated in national policies in different countries and developed their own infrastructures and in network to increase impact and visibility of the scientific production.

The scientific communication in Latin America was consolidated through transnational and region circuits of their own, beyond the circuits of hegemonic prestige, supposedly considered neutral (BEIGEL, 2016). In addition to initiatives of vanguard of extreme importance for Latin America, come from the principle that knowledge is a tool that must serve beyond traditional circuits of scientific production. It is from this understanding that the notion of open science, open access, sharing and public commitment are understood as key elements for science in Latin America (VESSURI et al., 2014) and the key to contribution of the region with “the rest of the world”.

As reminded by Santiago Castro-Gómez (2012), decolonizing the Latin American university means introducing the decolonial thinking through the incorporation of trans disciplinarity and complex thinking, which allows a cognitive exchange between western science and other forms of knowledge production. The decolonization of high education, therefore, is not a “reversal of the colonial moment for the post-colonial” (COLAÇO; DAMÁSIO, 2012), but rather a position of continuous fight for a more open, plural and participative university. That has been the greatest epistemological contribution of Latin America, since the critical studies of communication in the region to the development of policies and infrastructures of open science.

Final Considerations

The Latin American tradition of research in Communication with solid roots and its historic importance cannot be underestimated. Not only in Latin America was the first region outside the United States to lead systematic research in the field, how it developed its own perspective, focused in a critical perspective that highlighted the socio-cultural dimension of communicational phenomenon, to the difference of American researches. Despite that, more recently, the research in Communication disappeared the scenario of research of international reference. That didn't happen because research stopped from existing, or because they became irrelevant. What changed were the criteria that define the research of international reference.

In the wake of the process of neoliberal globalization, led by United States, a new system of reference emerged, with an institutional bias frankly favorable to that country, and, in second place, the West. These circumstances allowed that research based in American institutions had a disproportionate weight in the capacity of defined the agenda and the terms of research in Communication, and, therefore, instituted the basis of an academic imperialism, deepening the dependence of peripheral countries in relation to the United States and to western countries. Even more important, the capacity of defining the research agenda converted in a strategic political asset, as it allows to give real value scientifically validated to originated perspectives in certain societies and not in others and, based in them, justify concrete actions, taken in international levels as unacceptable or desirable. In a time in which actors hosted in the United States serve as base to intervention initiatives in political processes in Latin American countries, illustrated by the Brazilian and Bolivian cases, the risks associated to this situation and structural asymmetry in the academic field become fairly evident.

There is a last point to point out, however. As big as it is, in the preference, the asymmetry of academic system in favor of the United States and the West starts to give signs of depletion. The unipolar order that served as material foundation to the asymmetric academic model has

been challenged by emerging powers, such as China and Russia, for example, and pressures for a more plural academic environment become increasingly more common. It is reasonable to suppose, thus, that a new global academic system come to replace the current. But in what terms this system should be structured? Here, again, Latin American has important lessons to offer. “Erased” from the research scenario by the anglophone circuit that has dominated the scenario of global research since the end of the last century, the Latin American research resisted and built a rich circuit of scientific communication, based in a logic of open access to its products, in opposition to the predominant commercial model in the anglophone universe.

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