

Emergent Latin American Theories of International Communication in a Post-Global World

Katherine Reilly
Simon Fraser University
kreilly@sfu.ca

Abstract

Latin America's rich tradition of critical international communication research can be recuperated through an approach to research and knowledge production that emphasizes communication's emergent epistemic processes of geopolitical production. For researchers, this can be done through careful consideration of the various stages of the knowledge production process including critical engagement with existing works, conceptual inquiry that takes up the stories that are told about key ideas, and an approach to problem definition that emphasizes the geopolitical markers and epistemological fragments that shape regions of knowledge production. These ideas are illustrated through two examples: communicative sovereignty and regional communications infrastructure projects.

Introduction

Latin American communications research has a rich tradition grounded in strong theoretical contributions established in the 1960s and 1970s (Waisbord, 2014). In the area of international communication, this work draws on the region's theoretical contributions to international relations and development studies, particularly theories of dependency (dos Santos, 1978). However, the critical force of this tradition has faced erosion from a number of pressures over the past decades, including various waves of political incursion into the academy, historical shifts, and the difficulties of maintaining research in the face of neoliberal constraints on intellectual production (Sabatini, 2012).

In some cases, these pressures have caused researchers to choose empirical over theoretical work. In particular, work on international issues has been pushed strongly in the direction of activist approaches to foreign affairs (Merke, 2011) under the direction of academics like Chilean political scientist, Luciano Tomassini (Heine, 2011). For communications this means studying the role of public relations, public opinion or e-government in activist foreign affairs (Merke & Pauselli, 2014). There is immediate strategic value in this kind of research; however, it can come at the cost of either larger processes of systematization, or sustained reflection on the state of a field of study. Researchers also take up 'foreign' theoretical perspectives to explain Latin American phenomena. We see this, for example, with the application of Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power' to studies of the region's foreign affairs (Freytas, 2008) and communicative activities (Manfredi Sanchez, 2011). Examples like these are troubling because they suggest decline in local theoretical capacity, as well as a divorce of communications from political economic thinking. Finally, we see researchers of international communication

focusing on the implications of international regulation for domestic processes (Mastrini et al., 2012) rather than looking at the regional or international communications of Latin America (Reilly 2014).

All together, these pressures cause us to question whether a Latin American regional approach to critical international communication studies continues to exist. There have been efforts to recuperate and rethink Latin America's critical tradition of international scholarship (see, for example, Beigel's 2006 review of dependency theory), but it is not immediately apparent that these efforts can lead to adequate theoretical frameworks for thinking about communications in the region. Theories of core-periphery relations, dependency or empire do little to help us understand the complex relations of cooperation and conflict between Venezuela and Brazil, for example, and even less to understand how the communications of local non-state actors work to reshape those relations around questions of communicative sovereignty and justice, rather than security or economic competition. Older critical frameworks have also been complemented and at times challenged with theories of audience reception, cultural hybridity, post-colonialism and the like. In addition, 'imperialist' frameworks are less able to grapple with the dynamics of combined and uneven development, of the sort described by David Harvey (1975), and the ways in which these complex processes produce geopolitical realities. This last bit is particularly crucial to consider in this moment of geopolitical upheaval during which global growth-inequality is being complicated by new forms of state and regional consolidation.

In this paper I argue that recuperating Latin America's critical tradition of international communications studies requires consideration of larger processes of research design. Indeed, a focus on the region as something enacted is complementary to critically engaged perspectives on knowledge production. In this view, research is engagement with the world, and the way in which Latin Americans carry out their engagement with the world is producing of the region in which they find themselves. If communication is an epistemic act, then knowledge about communication needs to be self-conscious of its epistemic processes because these processes work to enact the world. If anyone should understand this, it should be we, the communications researchers given our study of issues such as ideology, propaganda, consent and reception. With this in mind, I argue that the best way to locate a critical regional tradition of critical international communications research within larger processes of global power shift and geopolitical upheaval is by enacting it through the research process. In what follows I look at three stages in the research design process: critique, conceptual inquiry, and problem definition. I then consider the implications of research design for two contemporary international communications issues in the region: communicative sovereignty and the construction of regional communications infrastructure projects.

Critique: Research as Martyr

To locate emerging regions of critical scholarship, it is necessary to begin the research process with conscientiously critical reflection on existing scholarship. For me, this means understanding research as a martyr to the cause of knowledge production. In other words, I see research as something that dies for its 'religious' beliefs about knowledge production.

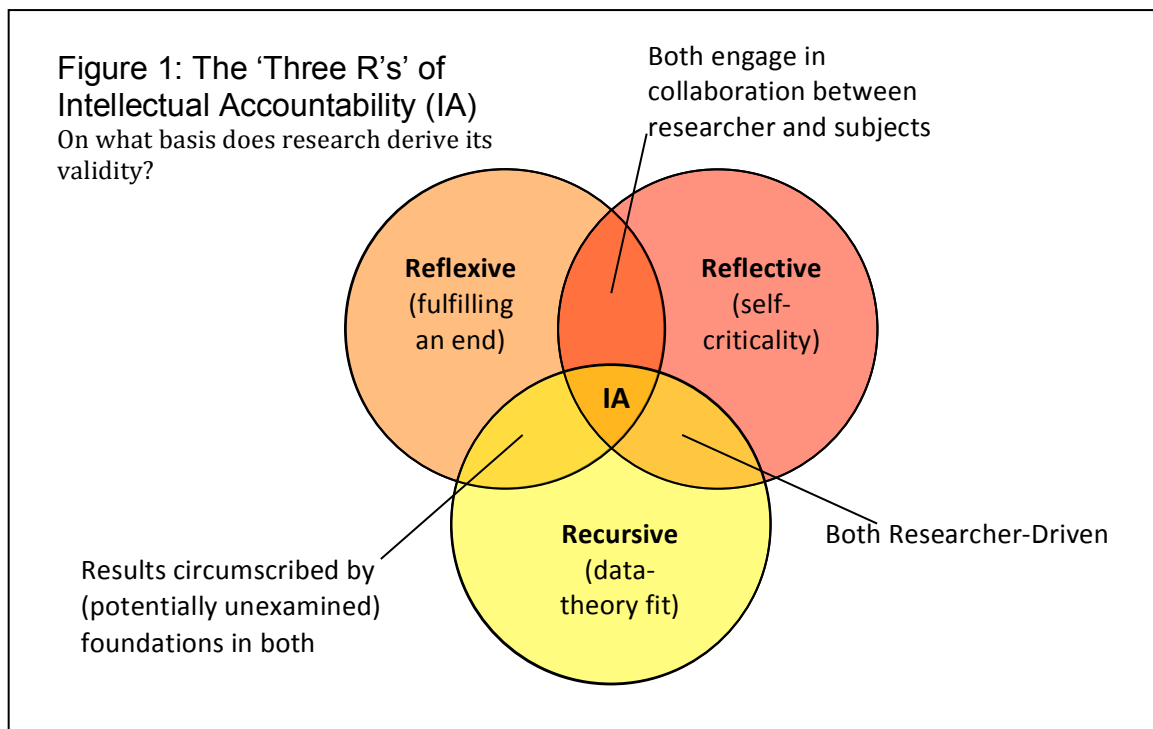
It can be difficult to understand research as something that must die for its own cause. In part this is because of the kind of teaching universities often impart around knowledge production. Perhaps the biggest problem here is that the academy tends to separate the study of philosophy of knowledge from the study of methods. At best we teach people how to interview within a particular tradition such as anthropology. At worst we teach people how to gather 'data' through an 'interview' as a form of 'qualitative' analysis with no reference to larger questions of knowledge production. Why this divide instead of, for example, critical, interpretive and positivistic approaches to knowledge production (Merrigan et al, 2012). I suppose the quantitative-qualitative separation serves as a pedagogical convenience. But in the long run we do a disservice by organizing knowledge in this way because we limit knowledge seekers to a transactional engagement with their world that focuses on data extraction and systematization. The problem with this should be especially familiar, and appalling, to students of communications: method is to research what clicktivism is to advocacy. Knowing that your click is qualitative (a statement) versus quantitative (a statistic) makes no real difference here. Limiting knowledge production to methods prevents us from being self conscious of how we communicate worlds into being through our knowledge producing endeavors.



A more complete approach to knowledge production considers the ways in which ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods come together to constitute a program of knowledge production (Grix, 2002). The assumptions we bring to the world will influence our beliefs about what can be known (performed, communicated, etc.). And these in turn shape our approach to design processes, and ultimately the types of methods we choose to employ. It doesn't matter if you are an artist, a scientist or a philosopher, this will hold true. Within international studies, for example, positivism and realism go hand in hand in their depiction of the state system, while imperialism relies on a dialectical approach to knowledge production. Choosing a method without thinking through its implications for the type of story it will cause you to tell is like choosing a horse to travel from Calcutta to Caracas just because it's a mode of transportation. Instead, the most convincing and powerful knowledge demonstrates coherence between

its vision of how the world works, its philosophy of knowledge, and its systems of ideational production.

Understanding this is helpful, but it only gets us so far. A work may be coherent with itself, but just because we recognize the qualities of a work, we need not feel compelled to accept the ideas that it communicates. We may, indeed, comprehend the power, beauty or novelty of a work even as we disagree with it, and we may feel compelled to critique the work for precisely this reason. Criticizing other people's knowledge products should be done conscientiously. Throwing research to the lions can be entertaining, but we should be attuned to the larger implications of what we do when we pull knowledge apart limb from limb. Dissecting research is an excellent way to understand the religious powers of it: if research has ideological overtones, then critique will reveal them. Engaging in this kind of criticism is a great way to advance our own personal commitments to knowledge production, but more to the point, it will also force us to acknowledge what makes research 'good' within a particular context. This, in turn, will be revealing of what the relevant research context is, or what holds a 'region' of knowledge production together.



There are many different ways of approaching the martyrization of research, and we would ideally want to search for criteria that are locally relevant, but for the purpose of illustration I will share my own perspective on research programs. In my view, we can call knowledge producers to account according to how they justify their work. This vision is captured in Figure 1. Is knowledge 'good' when it fulfills an end, when it exhibits strong data-theory fit, or when its author is carefully self-reflexive of her own knowledge processes? Note that the community to whom research is accountable shifts in each case, as does its form of evaluation. What I have called 'reflexive knowledge' is accountable

to the needs and desires of the beneficiaries or recipients of knowledge (Nicholls, 2009). This will be familiar to Latin Americans as Participatory Action Research (Fals Borda, 2006). ‘Reflective knowledge’ is the notion that researchers should engage critically with the standards by which they (themselves) judge verity (Ulrich, 2006). Reflectiveness recognizes the contingent nature of theorizing, but ultimately the author of the research will produce an account true to her own biases, agendas and experiences. Much interpretive research falls within this category of thinking. Finally ‘recursive research’ is accountable to a community of thinkers and their standards of analytical rigor and is what we typically think of when we focus on ensuring validity in the fit between data and theory.¹ Here we find positivistic lines of thought.

Comparing different modes of intellectual accountability in this way raises uncomfortable questions about the various religious commitments of knowledge producers. Is it OK for research to exhibit unreliable results if it serves to help a community acquire urgently needed services? How would we feel about a study that produces highly reliable findings, but which does so using essentialist categories of analysis that stigmatize particular social groups? Asking these sorts of questions is exactly the point, because they cause us to start thinking carefully about the kinds of knowledge production that are important in a particular ‘region’ of knowledge production. What counts as ‘good’ research will shift depending on the ‘region.’

Research as martyr is a very empowering vision, because it makes knowledge production a creative act that rests in the hands of individuals. We are each responsible for deciding what kind of engagement we want to have with the world, and what kind of knowledge we ultimately want to communicate. We make those decisions in conversation with the decisions of other scholars, and this means that we do so in particular historical contexts. Like the martyrs, good research has ideological causes to which it is committed, but also like the martyrs, it must pursue those causes within historical contexts that may be more or less friendly.

This is also a radically pluralist vision (Santos, 2007) that supports the idea of cognitive justice (Visvanathan, 1997). This commitment to epistemic or hermeneutical justice invariably raises the question of whether and when some ways of knowing are better than others. Cognitive justice argues for equal respect for different ways of knowing, but detractors worry that this opens the door to oppressive or destructive systems of knowledge.² My own view is that diversity cannot exist without disagreement, and we should welcome the resulting debates as an opportunity to generate greater understanding of the research commitments that are typical of particular political-economic contexts. Furthermore, the point is to avoid hermeneutical injustice, which is a situation in which “a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (Fricker, 2007). In other words, we

¹ Please note that reflective, reflexive and recursive are words that get used in very different ways by different authors.

² This is a well-trodden debate, which I will not rehash here. A summary can be found in Sparks, 2008.

should not see Latin America as a geographically given region of knowledge production, but rather as a context for emergent epistemic regions. Allowing, and indeed fostering, open debate about these processes provides a means to uncover the characteristics, boundaries and inequalities of that terrain.

Conceptual Inquiry: How to get to Caracas

Another critique that might be leveled at this vision is that it atomizes in ways that undermine cultural or class logics, or makes impossible the identification of knowledge-producing regions. Indeed, pursuing this kind of work asks that researchers reflect deeply on their commitments, a task which ethnographers refer to as positionality (Takacs, 2002). This need not necessarily lead to atomization.

By way of example, I recently asked a group of graduate students to write a paper in which they explored their positionality vis-à-vis knowledge production. My class included several 'international' students, including four from Beijing and two from Latin America (though it must be said that the 'Canadian' students were also diverse in their origins). The students bore the assignment like a kind of castigation, and I spent many hours helping them think through their commitments to knowledge production. But interestingly, they each faced the 'punishment' very differently. Some students worried about their 'research identity' or lack thereof, while others focused on the problem of essentialization in the research process. I found the reaction of the four individuals from China to be particularly interesting. It would be tempting to blame their reticence to engage with the idea of positionality on language or educational background. But as I graded the final papers and digested their reflections, it came to me that the assignment itself embodied a violence—that asking people to publicly proclaim their epistemological commitments was not unlike subjecting people to a Maoist struggle session within a cultural revolution. Mao, after all, was asking people to explore their positionality vis-à-vis the project of Chinese socialism! I realized that the Chinese students came by their suspicions of the assignment quite honestly, even if they weren't entirely conscious of the source. I later confirmed my theory in conversation with a colleague. This result convinced me that commitments to knowledge production have a co-constitutive relationship with cultures and classes. That relationship may be complex and polyvocal, but context will nonetheless bear some weight in our various engagements with the world.

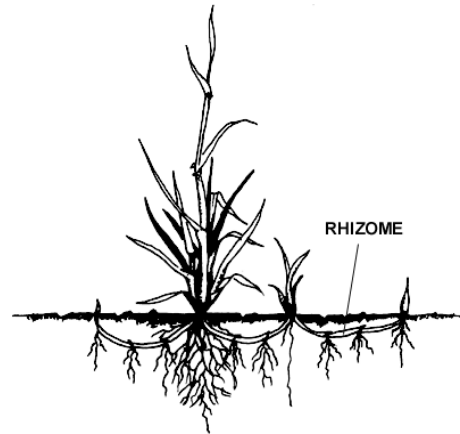
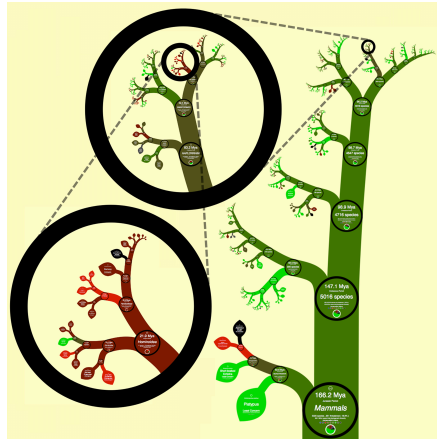
Indeed, it is precisely this tendency towards the formation of significant clusters of understanding within given historical periods that we need to focus on when designing research projects. This brings us to a second topic, which I have called 'conceptual inquiry' but which is often mistakenly referred to as a 'literature review.' To be sure, there is something out there called a literature review. It generally identifies the parameters of a field, and the debates within it, with reference to a body of literature. I'm suspicious of that activity, however, and beg that we carefully interrogate the uses to which literature reviews are put. I find that much of the time they function as a kind of justification for the research that is being done, but in ways that are often highly questionable. "Many researchers are travelling from Calcutta to Caracas, some of them by horse, and some of them by bicycle. But my work will differentiate itself through

walking.” I’d rather think about conceptual inquiry instead—because it provides a means through which to grapple with the communicative and investigative processes that give rise to knowledge producing regions. It also sets the groundwork for understanding one’s individual role within that project.

When I speak of conceptual inquiry what I mean is a systematic engagement with the meanings and applications of ideas that are central to a project of inquiry. For example, in my own work the idea of openness is important because I do research on networked spaces, while one of my graduate students has done a great deal of thinking about the idea of sovereignty because she is researching the food sovereignty movement. Conceptual inquiry helps us to locate the cultural, ideological or symbolic content of an idea. But conceptual inquiry is more than just an exercise in defining terms or locating the origins of words (etymology), although that may be part of it. It is also a careful accounting for how we tell the story *of* that concept, and this means that it must also offer a reflection on *the ways in which* a concept is changing through time. It is not just the fact of change that matters here, but more importantly, our approach to capturing that change in the stories that we tell when we communicate the conceptual heritage of our research.

Metaphors of ‘conceptual heritage’ can take an infinite number of forms, of which I will share a few popular social science tropes. When we depict concepts as having traditional content, then we emphasize resilience and cultural significance by trying to demonstrate *stability*. When we depict concepts as changing through *evolution*, the suggestion is that they morph teleologically through ‘natural’ adaptive processes. When we depict concepts as changing *dialectically*, as does Gramsci, we are pointing to the compromises and struggles at work in holding together a cultural whole. When we explore concepts through *genealogy* like Foucault, then the object is to uncover the ways in which power works quietly, like a gardener in the night, to prune the arborescent ‘truths’ of the world into shape. When we approach concepts through the *rhizomatic* metaphor given to us by Deleuze and Guatarri then we are both questioning the stability of functional wholes, and also suggesting that conceptual ‘moments’ are emergent, contingent, and result from complex processes. In this view, concepts are not random or relativistic social constructs, but rather they are rearrangements of old ideas into new wholes that have ontological bearing (De Landa, 2006).

Figure 2: Arborescent versus Rhizomatic Metaphors



The point here is not only that conceptual inquiry should be done as part of research design (it should), but also that the ways in which scholars typically depict concepts and their change processes *communicates* knowledge cultures and regions into being within particular historical contexts. In particular, we can expect that the metaphors adopted by scholars of international communication in Latin American at the current juncture will capture something of the contemporary reality of the moment. Indeed, I believe that this is precisely something that international communications scholars should address in their thinking, and that doing so can be productive of regional perspectives. This isn't a question of how others got to Caracas, but rather a question of how others *understood* and *recounted* the trip.

Problem Definition: Epistemology and Global Shifts

Conceptual inquiry should be an integral part of what is typically called 'problem definition,' (though I balk at creating such a strong link between research design and the resolution of 'problems'). Problem definition is about selecting a topic, knowing how you will relate it to your personal vision of what makes research 'good,' and figuring out how you will communicate the story of concepts that are important to your work. When it comes to recuperating critical scholarship on international communication, then, the 'problem' faced by researchers is that of capturing the politically-informed processes that produce knowledge-bearing regions. This will of course rest on the former: the politics of martyrdom and dominant accounts of histories of knowledge. Given this, in what follows I reflect on the ways in which critical international communications scholarship might tackle the problem of identifying regions of knowledge production.

Contemporary theories of international processes often take up "variegated capitalism" (Peck and Theodore. 2007) or combined and uneven development, as a way to capture differing experiences with incorporation into what is now a fully global capitalist system, as well as the active role of states and other actors in ongoing processes of capitalist formation. For economic geographers, this can be understood in terms of the different geo-social processes that work to reproduce capitalism in different ways (Hudson, 2004). It should be noted that this is a post-global approach to understanding, since the emphasis is not on the emergence of global spaces, but rather on the dynamics of social, economic

and political processes *given* global integration. This approach puts more emphasis on the social production of capitalism, and by extension, varieties of media systems corresponding to varieties of capitalism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) within a globalized system (Waisbord, 2013). Thus Robinson argues “more determinant (of causal priority) in conceptualizing regions within the larger unity of the emerging global economy and society than uneven accumulation, while still important, is the distinct configurations of social forces and institutions that arise from these configurations” (2011, p. 355).

What this means is that if we want to build a link between the constitution of a region and its perspectives on communication research, then we need to understand how different groups “make the world intelligible by opening our experiences to alternative sources of normativity” (Matereke, 2012, p. 165) within a unified global context. This question is particularly important given the many calls by post-development scholars for alternative ways of knowing, epistemologies of the south (Santos, 2006), cognitive justice (Visvanathan, 2002), methodologies based in regional modernities (Shome, 2012), “diversality” (Mignolo, 2002), and the like. These works rest on the assumption that epistemological openness will lead to alternative futures and will therefore release the global periphery from the shackles of hegemonic Western epistemologies. Where these works often fall short, however, is in their vision of how ways of knowing will connect with historical processes and their social formations.

Relationships between epistemological processes, communication and historical formations can be established through geopolitics of knowledge. Classical discussions of geopolitics take categories such as territory or statehood as given. But in more recent work, “geopolitics is discourse about world politics, with a particular emphasis on state competition and the geographical dimensions of power” (Tuathail, 2006, p. 1). This definition is useful because it draws our attention to the communicative processes that construct patterns of geopolitical relations. However, the emphasis on state power limits the field of potential geopolitical forces and excludes subaltern actors from our consideration, limiting us to the sphere of “visible” politics and to the authoritative texts that produce dominant conceptions of space and time (Patil 2013).

We can address this problem by leveraging the work of Mendieta (2007), who suggests we focus on “geopolitical markers” because “they become the means by which sectors of society are precisely excluded and written out of history, from the web of human interdependence.” These markers are formed from “epistemological fragments”—“fragments of society, of human consciousness”—that are “given life within specific geohistorical contexts” (pp. 3–4). That is to say, knowledge is taken up in specific ways that constitute processes of social, political, and economic discrimination, subordination, or exclusion. Thus patterns of epistemological accountability or conceptual inheritance will establish the geopolitical regions knowledge production.

Mendieta’s approach to geopolitics gives us both the possibility of hegemonic knowledge-power and a way to engage with specific incarnations of power within particular histories, cultures, and languages. This concept makes it possible to study the different actors and processes at work in establishing and maintaining social, political,

and economic boundaries, and we can imagine different types of geopolitical markers that work in different ways to structure different types of relationships. These markers can take on the cultural practices and local knowledges of the groups that uphold them. In this sense, geopolitical markers are more than just dividing lines; they are also the confluence (intersections) of complex social practices that produce them and result from them. In this way, geopolitical markers are both produced by and producing of power. But they are also within the reach of those who wish to create change given that they are upheld by the everyday practices and assumptions about the parameters of reason in which we all engage.

This means that rather than seeing the contemporary moment of global power shifts as a brief period of transition between moments of hegemonic consolidation (as Realist international relations scholarship might do), it needs to be understood as a period during which the renegotiation of geopolitical markers can reveal the perimeters of intelligibility on which history is constructed. The forces (institutions, regulations, definitions, traditions) that produce and reproduce markers of inclusion and exclusion and that mark out the terrain of regulation and emancipation will shift. Contradictions will emerge between old logics and new logics, and this will create opportunities to reflect productively on the terms through which we make sense of the world—the epistemological fragments that establish the parameters of human consciousness.

In other words, by exploring these regions of knowledge production, scholars of international communication can engage in transformative work. To the extent that there is a Latin American perspective on international communication, then it will reflect the communicative and epistemic efforts of social groups as they work to reorganize the geopolitical markers and normative constructs that shape their integration into larger global and regional flows. On continuation, I consider how this might manifest in concrete terms.

Post-Global Latin American Communications

I have looked at three stages in the research design process and I have argued that a Latin American regional perspective on communications will emerge out of the processes of critique, conceptual inquiry and problem definition that Latin American researchers pursue. I have also suggested that we can understand the relationship between those processes of research design and the constitution of a ‘region’ through geopolitics of knowledge and the ways in which those processes shape localized processes of sense making within an already globalized context. Once a ‘problem definition’ has been established, scholars naturally look for case studies through which to study their particular preoccupations. In this section I want to briefly tackle two examples of how international communications scholars can reveal emergent regional perspectives on communications within a larger global political economic context.

A perfect example of this is the emergence of the idea of ‘communicative sovereignty’ in Latin America in recent years. Over the past decade, several Latin American governments have re-written national communications laws to ensure greater distribution

of communications licenses among different social groups (Hintz, 2011). These reforms have allowed for a flourishing of community radio outlets across the region which are, in turn, supported by web-based networks of alternative media and social movement actors. News distribution channels such as Radio Mundo Real (www.radiomundoreal.fm), ALER (www.aler.org) and AMARC (www2.amarc.org) collect stories from local actors and also cover regional events that have local implications. They make their stories available for republication or rebroadcasting free of charge, and in this way support both the flourishing of local media, and processes of integration in the region through its social movement bases.

These expressions of so-called ‘communicative sovereignty’ (personal interview) most likely take their cue from a longer tradition of thought about food sovereignty in the region. However I want to suggest that communicative sovereignty has unique characteristics that can be understood through the geopolitical approach described above. The demand for local control over communications might be characterized as a demand for greater political autonomy. However, this rather simplistic approach not only reduces sovereignty to autarky, but also reduces communications to transmissions that are voided of their content or interpretation. For scholars of international communication it is much more interesting and productive to understand communicative sovereignty as an effort to reframe the relations of justice that establish the foundations of the state (Agamban, 2005). In this sense, communicative sovereignty can be understood as mediated processes of geopolitical struggle over the normative content of justice, a struggle which is emblematic of a moment of global power shift during which both the internal and external forces that define those normative markers are in flux.

Some of my own research demonstrates that regional alternative news networks in Latin America have a strong coverage of regional processes and events, while mainstream news networks, despite having regional distribution, focus their coverage on either national or global news coverage (Reilly and Febres Cordero, 2014). This makes sense when we consider the differing interests of alternative and mainstream news producers vis-à-vis the definition of sovereignty as a framework for justice in the region. And more to the point, it demonstrates how the emergent production of Latin America as a knowledge region is shaped by struggles over the definitions of belonging, rights, productivity and the like.

The second example revolves around the strategic positioning of telecommunications in the region. Between appeals to the United Nations by Russia and China, and Snowden’s revelations about the surveillance activities of the American NSA, telecommunications have become the subject of intense global geopolitical contestation in recent years. These struggles have touched Latin America in several important ways. Take for example UNASUR’s project, advanced within the South American Infrastructure and Planning Council (COSIPLAN), to build a fiber optic ring around South America (Zibechi, 2012). This new infrastructure will relieve South American dependency on private commercial broadband links, which are both very expensive (contributing up to 50% of the end-user cost to connectivity in the region) and also pass through data centers in the United States (which poses a security threat). The project could be understood through traditional

geopolitical analysis, but this would bypass a rich Latin American conversation about the meaning of region and international relations, and the role of communications in it.

Specifically, this project is viewed very differently by different states in the region. For example, in Brazil's view, the fibre optic ring is an infrastructure and service provision project. States need to work through regional bodies such as UNASUR to build this type of fundamental infrastructure, using state-financial backing and oversight as required. But once the backbone is built, and national broadband infrastructure is extended out to sub-regional centers, end-user pricing should be ensured through competition among local service providers. Ultimately this means that the market will be the guiding principle for the regulation of broadband infrastructure in the region. Venezuela, on the other hand, supports the project because of the security benefits it will bring, as well as its potential to support autonomous development. According to the Venezuelan Minister of Communication the broadband project is merely a first step in creating regional informational autonomy. Once the ring is complete, Venezuela envisions state-run or sponsored data hubs as well as a regional Internet search engine that will reorganize flows of information throughout South America (Prensa Latina, 2012). Meanwhile, other countries in the region are pursuing subsidiary policies that might take advantage of these larger infrastructure planning initiatives. This is the case in Ecuador where it is state policy to actively pursue the implementation of a knowledge society based in the principles of open knowledge (see www.floksociety.org).

How should we understand these coexisting but different processes? Certainly we could look at them in terms of traditional forms of political-economic competition, and there may be some element of that at work in these examples. But I would argue that it is much richer and more reflective of the emergent international communications theorizing of the region to focus on the geopolitical markers and epistemological fragments that emerge out of these debates. UNASUR and ALBA present alternative visions for regional integration in South America, so what is truly interesting about these regional communications policies are the ways in which they are justified and taken up in local contexts, and how they reorganize the ideas that structure social relations in the region, both through the communications infrastructures that they produce, and through the different ways they are understood. In this sense, examples like these ones present excellent opportunities to locate already existent theorizing of international communication in Latin America today.

Conclusions

The question of whether Latin American is a knowledge-producing region is misleading. Historical contexts are producers of knowledge and that knowledge itself is a form of communication. For communications scholars in particular, the objective should not be to debate the existence of a region, but rather to engage with the processes of communication that are at work, including the epistemic aspects of communicative processes, and the ways in which they give rise to regions of knowing. That means examining the various stages of knowledge producing processes and debating the characteristics of those processes that are important to a particular time. As I've tried to

emphasize throughout this paper, in order to be able to do this, we need to move away from cookie cutter visions of research, or closed processes of research program formation. Rather we need to look at research as a creative process in which individual researchers, located within a particular historically informed social context, take up particular commitments to research, adopt certain metaphors for story-telling about concepts and their processes of change through time, and define problems in particular ways.

When we understand theory in this way, as something that arises out of history, rather than as something that is bounded by a geographical region, then it becomes possible to make a relationship between the communication of knowledge and the geopolitics of the contemporary moment. In particular in this post-global age, localities struggle to integrate themselves into universal economic and cultural processes, and these struggles will include epistemic processes. It is through the examination of these processes that we can locate emergent theorizations of international communications, and also analyze, from a critical perspective, the power structures at work in the constitution of these processes. In my own work, this means in particular making a relationship between geopolitics and knowledge, and I trust that it will give rise to new insights into critical international communications.

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