

Communication and Epistemological Struggle: An Approach to the History of the Field and the Dialogue between Political Economy and Decolonial Studies

Comunicación y lucha epistemológica: una aproximación a la historia del campo y al diálogo entre la economía política y los estudios decoloniales

Comunicação e luta epistemológica: uma abordagem da história do campo e do diálogo entre a economia política e os estudos decoloniais

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Abstract: This article examines the historical development of communication studies in Latin America through the trajectory of the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIIC) and the evolution of critical communication thought in the region. It identifies four major stages in the field's development, from communication and development studies and cultural imperialism theories to Latin American cultural studies and contemporary debates surrounding the political economy of communication. The article argues that current transformations in global capitalism, digital platforms, and geopolitical tensions have reopened the need for a renewed epistemological project capable of articulating critical perspectives across the field. Particular attention is devoted to the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) and its institutional consolidation in Latin America, as well as to the emergence of Decolonial Studies as a significant intellectual force. Rather than treating these traditions as mutually exclusive, the article proposes a dialogue between Marxist political economy and decolonial thought, drawing especially on the work of Enrique Dussel. It concludes that the epistemological struggle in communication research today requires interdisciplinary collaboration capable of confronting technological determinism, epistemic coloniality, and contemporary forms of capitalist domination while strengthening Latin American critical thought and its international projection.

Keywords:

Communication studies; political economy of communication; decolonial studies; epistemological struggle; Latin American communication thought; ALAIIC

Resumen: Este artículo examina el desarrollo histórico de los estudios de comunicación en América Latina a partir de la trayectoria de la Asociación Latinoamericana de Investigadores de la Comunicación (ALAIC) y de la evolución del pensamiento crítico comunicacional en la región. Se identifican cuatro grandes etapas en la constitución del campo, desde los estudios sobre comunicación y desarrollo y las teorías del imperialismo cultural hasta los estudios culturales latinoamericanos y los debates contemporáneos en torno a la economía política de la comunicación. El texto sostiene que las transformaciones actuales del capitalismo global, las plataformas digitales y las tensiones geopolíticas han reabierto la necesidad de un nuevo proyecto epistemológico capaz de articular perspectivas críticas diversas dentro del campo. Se presta especial atención a la Economía Política de la Comunicación (EPC) y a su consolidación institucional en América Latina, así como a la emergencia de los Estudios Decoloniales como una fuerza intelectual relevante. Lejos de considerar ambas tradiciones como incompatibles, el artículo propone un diálogo entre la economía política marxista y el pensamiento decolonial, particularmente a partir de la obra de Enrique Dussel. Se concluye que la lucha epistemológica en los estudios de comunicación exige hoy formas de colaboración interdisciplinaria capaces de enfrentar el determinismo tecnológico, la colonialidad del saber y las nuevas formas de dominación capitalista, fortaleciendo al mismo tiempo el pensamiento crítico latinoamericano y su proyección internacional.

Palabras clave:

Estudios de comunicación; economía política de la comunicación; estudios decoloniales; lucha epistemológica; pensamiento comunicacional latinoamericano; ALAIC

Resumo: Este artigo examina o desenvolvimento histórico dos estudos de comunicação na América Latina a partir da trajetória da Associação Latino-Americana de Pesquisadores da Comunicação (ALAIC) e da evolução do pensamento crítico comunicacional na região. Identificam-se quatro grandes etapas na constituição do campo, desde os estudos de comunicação e desenvolvimento e as teorias do imperialismo cultural até os estudos culturais latino-americanos e os debates contemporâneos em torno da economia política da comunicação. O texto argumenta que as transformações atuais do capitalismo global, das plataformas digitais e das tensões geopolíticas reabriram a necessidade de um novo projeto epistemológico capaz de articular perspectivas críticas diversas no interior do campo. É dada especial atenção à Economia Política da Comunicação (EPC) e à sua consolidação institucional na América Latina, bem como à emergência dos Estudos Decoloniais como uma

importante força intelectual. Em vez de considerar essas tradições como incompatíveis, o artigo propõe um diálogo entre a economia política marxista e o pensamento decolonial, especialmente a partir da obra de Enrique Dussel. Conclui-se que a luta epistemológica nos estudos da comunicação requer hoje formas de colaboração interdisciplinar capazes de enfrentar o determinismo tecnológico, a colonialidade do saber e as novas formas de dominação capitalista, fortalecendo simultaneamente o pensamento crítico latino-americano e sua projeção internacional.

Palavras-chave:

Estudos da comunicação; economia política da comunicação; estudos decoloniais; luta epistemológica; pensamento comunicacional latino-americano; ALAIC

1. Introduction

At the end of 2014, when I left the presidency of Latin American Association of Communication Research (ALAIC), which I had held since 2009, I published, in issue 21 of the *Revista Latinoamericana de Ciencias da Comunicação*, year XI (July-December), an article that, in addition to the balance of the period, suggested a line of development of the Latin American communicational thought for the future, in terms of the epistemological struggle that was to come. I recalled at the outset, three key moments in the history of ALAIC that had an impact on the field at an epistemological level: its foundation in the seventies, marked by the presence of a group of researchers of great international impact, who participated directly or indirectly in the construction of the NOMIC; the development, from the eighties, of the research program that Jesús Martín-Barbero formally proposed at the end of his term as president of the association; and the period that began with the twin conferences in the Brazilian state of São Paulo, in 1992.

The first phase was that of Communication and Development studies and the studies of Cultural dependence or Cultural Imperialism; the second was marked by the prominence of the so-called Latin American Cultural Studies (LACS), and the third is the consolidation of the new format of the association, with its congresses and seminars, its working groups that represent a variety of paradigms and areas of research, according to the reconstruction project elaborated by José Marques de Melo. Subsequently, I defend the idea that the period from 2009 to 2014 represented an important change, which could be considered as the inauguration of a new (fourth) stage, although the epistemological element – suggested at the end of the article in terms of the construction of a new research program – was missing.

In the first part of this paper, I make a brief reading of the article. Secondly, I return to the idea of the research program that ended up being structured to some extent in the field of the Political Economy of Communication, Information and Culture (PEC), starting with the creation of a working group in this subfield at the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) in 2020. Finally, I defend a dialogue between the PEC and the new area of Decolonial Studies, which has appeared strongly in the subcontinent since then. The third part shows how it is possible to articulate these two fields from a Marxist perspective to understand capitalist development as a totality constituted in a subsumption-exteriority dynamic (Dussel, 1985).

2. ALAIC in the Face of the Challenges of the 21st Century

Taking into account the aforementioned history and the variety of theoretical perspectives and areas of research, for the period 2009-2014, the following principles of action were defined: (1) commitment of the new management to the history of the field and the recognition of the great contributions of the pioneers; Bolaño, 2014 (3) the common destiny of Latin American thought; (3) intercultural dialogue within it and (4) dialogue with other scientific entities, with the aim of "establishing an adequate space for Latin America in the international theoretical and epistemological debate and in the construction of its institutionality and its agendas, for the benefit of a communication committed to inclusive, sustainable and fair development" (Bolaño, 2014, p. 233).

With regard specifically to internationalization, the project sought to "on the one hand consider as internal the relations with other representative entities of Latin American critical thought, aiming, on the other hand, at strengthening the position of Latin America in the epistemological struggle at the global level" (idem, p. 237), which involved (and continues to involve) important activism together with other Latin American and international organizations. One of the extensive initiatives reported in the article and carried out during the period in the sense of "promoting internal debate and strengthening working groups, with the aim of gaining strength to face the challenge of an adequate insertion in the international debate" (idem, p. 233) was the creation of the *Journal of Latin American Communication Research* (JLACR).

Another noteworthy initiative was the inauguration of the ALAIC Summer School. Finally, it is worth mentioning the internal restructuring of the working groups and the expansion that meant the growth of the national associations of researchers in the region. The

most emblematic case is surely that of the incorporation of the Cuban association. The article concludes with the following paragraph:

Ultimately, it is a matter of stimulating creativity and channeling it towards the construction of a new research program of great breadth, transversal, interdisciplinary, diverse, capable of resuming, at a higher level of internal articulation, the leadership that Latin America had at different times in the world of communication research. This is the greatest challenge to be faced. (idem, p. 241)

It may not be possible to articulate such a program in an institution as diverse as ALAIC, which represents all the different theoretical and epistemological perspectives in the field of communication, although the object of study is always the same: the systems of social mediation that are defined, however, very differently between the different subfields and, in particular, between the cultural studies (LACS) that predominated, as a research program in Latin America in the years that followed Martín-Barbero's call, and that of the PEC. Despite their many identities and attempts at articulation, these two programs have never succeeded in establishing a broad and mutually fruitful dialogue. At this point, LACS have lost momentum, for reasons that cannot be discussed here. I will then very briefly present a review of the history of the PEC to finally take up a recent debate on Decolonial Studies (DS), seeking to relaunch the idea of a necessary dialogue between these approaches in favor of Latin American critical thinking.

3. A Very Brief Introduction to the History of the Political Economy of Brazilian and Latin American Communication

The field of study known as the Political Economy of Communication (PEC) has a very particular history. Its birth, in the academic field of Communication, occurred in very different ways around the world. In fact, this name ended up being adopted from the 90s, when a process of unification of the field began at an international level. Before that, it emerged here and there, always as a Marxist alternative to the analysis of communicative objects, focused on the reading of Marx's mature economic work and not on philosophical or political texts, as was the case before.

The expression PEC comes from the English-speaking schools, whether in North America, where the works of the Canadian Dallas Smythe or the American Herbert Schiller stand out, or in the United Kingdom, where several authors have become notable, among them Nicholas Garnham, a disciple of Raymond Williams, one of the founders of English Cultural Studies, but who should be included among the precursors of the new field,

especially with his work on *broadcasting*, which also ended up influencing the French school of Grenoble, whose best known figure is Bernard Miège. But this school, in its origin, was not defined by the PEC label, but as Economics of Communication and Culture (ECC), until the aforementioned process of unification began more precisely in 1992, after the two conferences held in Brazil, the refoundation conference of ALAIC and the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR), the first in the municipality of Embu-Guaçu and the second in Guarujá.

The other well-known French school is that of Armand Mattelart, whose first works, produced in his Chilean period, actually had another affiliation: that of the so-called studies on Dependency or Cultural Imperialism, which predominated in Latin American critical thought in the 1960s and 1970s. Mariano Zarowski (2025) emphasizes the influence that Latin American thought would have on Mattelart himself and that would accompany him when he returned to Europe, where he would be one of the founders of the French PEC. The Grenoble school, for its part, would have a strong influence on the constitution of studies on the political economy of communication in Spain and Quebec, for example, while the English-speaking perspectives would gain the world from the nineties onwards.

In Latin America, the pioneering works in the area are also from the seventies and eighties of the last century. Names such as Patricia Arriaga or Enrique Sánchez Ruiz in Mexico, Eriberto Muraro, Héctor Schmucler in Argentina, Roque Faraone in Uruguay, Bolaño or Othon Jambeiro in Brazil, Diego Portales in Chile and many others who are in the anthology published by CLACSO (Bolaño, 2022) stand out. Here too the appearance occurred quite spontaneously, in different countries, not directly influenced by the other schools of the PEC mentioned, but fundamentally by the Communication debate in general and by Latin American critical thinking, especially the theories of Cultural Imperialism or Cultural Dependence. It is like an internal critique of these theories that what later – with the (complex) process of unification – would be called PEC emerges in our continent.

In the 1990s, the PEC working groups of the Brazilian Society of Interdisciplinary Communication Studies (INTERCOM) and ALAIC were created, both based on the Observatory of Economics and Communication (OBSCOM) of the Federal University of Sergipe. The EPTIC Journal, the first specialized in the field worldwide, was also created at OBSCOM, as a joint activity of both groups. It was this journal, in turn, that convened the three founding congresses of the Latin Union of Political Economy of Information, Communication and Culture (ULEPICC), of which I was the first president. The first axis of the Brazilian PEC was constituted by the action of OBSCOM with the CEPOS group,

coordinated by Valério Cruz Brittos at the University of Vale do Rio dos Sinos (UNISINOS). After Brittos' death, his group would be transferred to the UFS, giving rise to the current OBSCOM/CEPOS group.

From the epistemological point of view, the foundational works of the research program represented by these groups were my master's and doctoral theses and the doctoral theses of Brittos and Ruy Sardinha Lopes, in addition to the works of Alain Herscovici, representative of the second generation of the French school, who has lived in Brazil since the nineties. From an institutional point of view, in addition to the activism of the founders of the field in research entities in Communication – and eventually also in Economics – OBSCOM/CEPOS and the journal EPTIC have functioned as a spin-off in the construction of this subfield and, after its restructuring in 2020, with the changes imposed on academic functioning by the Covid-19 pandemic, in view of the existence of cross-affiliations, it ended up helping to build a network of PEC groups related to this main line of Brazilian PEC.

After the decline and fragmentation of the ULEPICC project, efforts to organize an integrated Latin American field focused on the construction of a new group, within the Latin American and Caribbean Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), thus also reinforcing its markedly interdisciplinary character. The new group was created in 2022 and has since implemented an extensive program of publishing, organizing events, and networking. The group has 56 members, representing 13 countries and is coordinated by Daniela Monje, currently vice-president of ALAIC, Isabel Ramos, of FLACSO/Ecuador and myself. The group was redirected twice, in 2024 and 2026. In addition to the events and publications – books and the newsletter *Contra Senso*, created in 2025, the group develops common actions with other CLACSO groups and in 2025 co-founded the Network for Democratic Communication, which involves all CLACSO communication groups and civil society entities active in the field of communication.

For the 2026-2028 triennium, the group defined three lines of action: Epistemology and theory of the political economy of communication; Platform Capitalism and Regional Alternatives in the Field of ICTs; ICT policies and resistances. The latter is very traditional in communication studies in the subcontinent and articulates with groups dedicated to communication policies and popular and alternative communication. The second is related to current research on the platform economy, data, artificial intelligence and other correlated topics of great relevance. The OBSCOM/CEPOS group, for example, has been developing, since 2024, a comprehensive study on the regulation of digital networks and platforms in Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, the United States, the European Union and China. In this case

there is a relation, among others, with issues of law, regulation and geopolitics. The first line is the one that is specifically dedicated to the theories of PEC and interdisciplinary epistemological dialogue.

For my part, I have a particular interest, for reasons that must already be implicit, in the dialogue with decolonial thought and its environment. For convenience, I reproduce below, with due adjustments and updates, a short article originally published in Portuguese, as a participant in an intense debate that took place in Brazilian journals of political-academic intervention in early 2026.

4. For a consistent Marxist de-colonialism

The theories known as decolonial, postcolonial and similar have been presented as supposed radical opposition to Marxism. The objective of this part is to present a view of the problem, not from the perspective of philosophy, nor from the perspective of the critique of modernity in general, but from the critique of political economy and PEC particularly. Following the content of the debate, I begin with a brief personal statement, by way of contextualization, and then make some considerations based on the periodization and classification made by Vladimir Safatle, in a text to the journal *Piauí* that inaugurated one of the two lines of the debate. Thirdly, I dedicate myself to the second line, inaugurated with a text by Douglas Barros published on the *Boitempo* blog, which places the issue in the perspective of black thought. Finally, I try to indicate some issues in the sense of the proposal suggested in the title of this item.

4.1 Background

My first contact with decolonial literature was through an important collection released by CLACSO, organized by Edgardo Lander (2005). At the time I was still grappling with postmodern thought, protected in my Marxist or Marxian bunker, I sometimes said, following a preciousness necessary for the time of resistance against the single thought of the nineties of the last century. Even many Marxists were enchanted by the postmodernist idea, among them some respected authors who adopted it with great care, such as David Harvey or Fredrik Jameson. The most striking case was certainly that of Antonio Negri who, based on a debatable reading of the famous Marx's fragment on machines, established, alongside Michel Hardt and his colleagues and autonomist followers, a revisionism that is still quite influential, although declining, today. If there are already few who explicitly defend that ideology, which has not resisted the evidence, its central ideas, its post-structuralist heritage, the semiotic

drift, everything has been naturalized and is disseminated in different intellectual tendencies, including the decolonial debate.

In any case, reading the collection placed me in front of a new field of reflection and dialogue. In fact, much of what I found there, reinforced positions that I had defended when I proposed a Marxist (or Marxian) theory of communication that, at that time, was already known in the field. I was especially impacted by Anibal Quijano's chapter and his clarification about the constitution of modernity as a moment of reordering work at a global level, which Brazilian political economy had known for a long time. See, for example, the influential work of Fernando Novais (1979), a Marxist historical foundation adopted by the Institute of Economics of the State University of Campinas, where I received my economic training. A central Marxian concept in this perspective is that of primitive accumulation of capital, which inspired me in the definition of what I called primitive accumulation of knowledge (Bolaño, 2000), although resorting to other chapters of the first book of *Capital*.

If I had read the collection before, I could even have adopted the nickname of decolonial, because that, in the end, is what it was about. But there was something that did not fit, even in Quijano's analysis that I would largely adopt (Bolaño, 2015): his rejection of historical materialism. On the other hand, the collection was clearly presented as a junction of distinct and often contradictory perspectives, as exemplified by the position of each author in relation to the concept of postmodernity, ranging from uncritical acceptance to blunt criticism. And yet there was a common project that united everyone and with which I agreed: the critique of the Eurocentrism of the social sciences, in defense of Latin American thought. In my reception, I included, to stay with the most relevant, Celso Furtado, founder of Brazilian political economy, never mentioned in the decolonial field, whose concept of culture I had been working on (Bolaño, 2013).

With regard specifically to the decolonial project, instead of confrontation, I preferred to adopt a key author, a decolonial not simply Marxist, but a fine scholar of all of Marx's mature work, whose life project included a thorough and rigorous reading of it, from Latin America, for the twenty-first century: Enrique Dussel, considered the founder of decolonial thought and one of its most prolific developers. But its Marxist approach, considering most of the decolonial literature, has been, to say the least, amputated, because what we find is too much postmodernism and too little Marxism, or rather, too much anti-Marxism. In fact, the supposed decolonial leftism has been called into question on its own ground, as shown by Grossfogel's reaction against many of those who call themselves decolonial today, which he came to define as decolonial colonialists.

It is, in fact, an internal debate that exposes a deep, irreconcilable division between two groups of decolonial authors, both politically very active, separated precisely by their positions on revolutionary processes in Latin America, as can be seen in several of the author's lives found on YouTube, including an interesting interview with Katia Colmenares, another representative of the Dusselian school. In none of the interventions so far in the Brazilian debate initiated with Safatle's text (2026a) has this division been pointed out. On both sides, decolonialism is presented as an alternative unitary theory to Marxism. However, the issue is essential and touches, for example, the core of the interpretation of the Bolivarian revolution and the government of Venezuela (I clarify that my information on the subject predates the U.S. intervention of January 3 and the kidnapping of President Nicolás Maduro), but not only. The position of the Bolivian intelligentsia in the face of the coup d'état that overthrew President Evo Morales also illustrates this cleavage between two irreconcilable decolonial perspectives. Not to mention the blatant silence of a large number of decolonial and postcolonial intellectuals in relation to Gaza, as Safatle (2026b) also points out.

4.2 Periodization

Safatle's periodization is interesting because it presents a line of development of theories on the colonial problem that reaffirm the more general tendencies of the evolution of left-wing thought, which has a fundamental cutoff point at the time of the so-called resumption of U.S. hegemony (Conceição Tavares, 1992) during the Reagan administration. It is necessary to remember that after the Second World War, on the basis of the Breton Woods treaties, capitalism entered an unprecedented expansive phase that would facilitate, in the central countries, a workers' integration that was already a problem in the sixties, when the axis of emancipatory struggles shifted to a large extent to the so-called new social movements. Led by the sons of that working class that endured the horrors of war, they present a fair list of demands, but generally different from that of the old workers' movement that has led social revolutions since the nineteenth century worldwide. Part of these claims, in affluent societies, could be met, serving the ideological dispute with the Soviet bloc, also affluent at that time.

In these conditions, the revolutionary impulse moved radically to the periphery, where the welfare state systems were not implanted or, when they did, it was nothing more than a mockery of what was happening in the center, and where the peoples found themselves grappling with the new wave of decolonization, in Asia and Africa this time. It is no wonder that European critical thought has since regressed and Marxism has been displaced from its

previously unquestionable position with social movements and the working class, to its emblematic formal negation by the German Social Democratic Party, founded by Marx and Engels. Of course, the decline of European's real socialism played a crucial role in the defeat that would follow, but here it is worth noting the victory, in Europe, of the reformist positions and the different types of revisionism that have followed one another since then. The postmodernist ideology against which we struggled throughout the nineties played a fundamental role in the fight against Marxism.

It is then the periphery of the system that appropriates the revolutionary heritage. For this reason, the criticism of anti-colonial approaches, when it turns against Marxism, defined simply as European thought, will end up taking away all the fighters, from the center and the periphery, who have devoted their lives to the cause of the peoples. A very serious problem when a large part of the left, including that which calls itself extreme or radical, ends up letting itself be carried away, in the end, by discourse and, with it, the strategies of legitimization of a self-proclaimed democratic imperialism. Thus, the class struggle will become the struggle for democracy, understood, along the lines of the single thought, as formal bourgeois democracy, and even the projects of self-management, such as that of the former Yugoslavia, bombed by NATO, or that of the *participatory and leading democracy* of Bolivarian Venezuela today, surrounded and attacked by imperialism, will be defined by the neoliberal consensus to which all European social democracy adheres, as dictatorial and subject to boycotts and attacks aimed at regime change. Under these conditions, all silence is complicit.

But the founding principle of the post-colonial critique of the European left was just and enlightening: the political emancipation achieved in the post-war period did not eliminate the ideological domination entrenched in the new state structures and in the social relations reconstructed in agreement with the colonial powers themselves, which negotiated their supposed withdrawal under advantageous conditions. In this sense, they will say, if colonialism is gone, coloniality remains and is ingrained in the daily lives and consciousness of citizens. This perspective will also be adopted by Latin American decolonial thought (the third phase of Safatle's periodization), which will insist, on its part, on the epistemological question involved.

There is a polemic that cannot be taken up again within the limits of this text, referring to the generalization made by Safatle to the decolonial authors of the critique, generally valid for the postcolonials, according to which they are not properly peripheral thinkers insofar as they develop their academic careers in European and especially North

American universities. On this topic, Safatle himself (2026 b) presents an adequate response in his rejoinder to Barbosa (2026). In any case, the displacement that the author diagnoses from critical thinking to the University, a central institution in the reproduction of social relations at the national and international level, far from revolutionary movements, is undoubtedly a fundamental point to be considered in the debate, as this is the core of the epistemological struggle.

4.3 Black thought

More important at this point is to include a fourth perspective, in addition to those proposed by Safatle, because the great contribution, in my view, to the debate in question comes from another corner, self-defined as counter colonial, and begins with a respectful but forceful critique by Douglas Barros (2026a) of the work of Nego Bispo, an icon of this field. Another text that should be read carefully is the beautiful defense of Barros, disguised as criticism, made by Heloisa Gusmão and Mateus Paulo Filho (2026). In fact, what is noticeable is that this is another debate and it is disconcerting the little integration that exists between the two. Nor can I attempt an approximation within the limits of this text.

Anyway, what he defends means, ultimately, redirecting black thought back, not to an imaginary ancestry, linked to identity principles that he accuses of being romantic, but to the vein of the revolutionary thought and praxis of subjects like Fanon or Amílcar Cabral, which he quotes directly, but which includes a huge series of African leaders who, armed with the tools provided by Marx, they led the national liberation movements in the second half of the last century.

If, as Heloisa and Mateus affirm, speaking essentially to their internal audience, the danger of Douglas Barros' reflection lies in the fact that "his criticism takes us out of our fantasies", because the "affective and intellectual structure of romanticism – the nostalgia for a golden age, the search for pure roots, the construction of imaginary homogeneous communities – would be recognized as a form of ideological illusion, a symptom of the inability to confront dialectically the contradictions of the present", so that "we would be forced, by shame, to leave the comfortable position of moral denunciation and identity celebration to assume the disenchanted complexity of materialist analysis" and thus "we would be impelled, finally, to fight for a revolution", on the opposite side, the danger lies in that, since the black and mestizo people are the majority of the Brazilian working class, the slogan "all power to the black people" would make perfect sense. Not the power of General Michel Langley, then head of the United States Military Command in Africa who, with

imperialist impudence, offended Commander Ibrahim Traoré, calling the leader of the so-called second African independence, now underway in Burkina Faso and throughout the Sahel region, heir to the legacy of Thomas Sankara, a young soldier who is really very dangerous for the establishment. It is not African ancestry that opposes these two black men, but the class and interests that each objectively represents.

When Douglas Barros, both in the text referred to so far and in the preface he signs to Olúfemi Táiwò's book, *Against decolonization* (Barros, 2026b), states that "when colonialism is absolutized and made ahistorical (...) Africans are presented as mere powerless victims, who failed because they embraced the ideals of the colonizers" and that "modernity was not only the place of enslavement of Africans and indigenous people, but also the place of the production of meanings and riches arising from the fundamental work of Africans and indigenous people (...) executed not only manually, but intellectually", I recall Marx's lesson, according to which capital does not create anything new, everything comes from labor, that essential exteriority, as Dussel says, which must be subsumed at each rotation of capital, so that the recurrent movement of accumulation can continue, feeding on the surplus-value that labor always produces from the nothingness of capital.

This is the consequent materialist perspective and does not mean denying the existence and importance of those elements of a cultural and epistemological order emphasized by the decolonial critique. On the contrary, the concept of primitive accumulation of knowledge (Bolaño, 2000), which explains, in the first place, the expropriation of the knowledge developed by the medieval artisanal working class by capital throughout the manufacturing period, which will allow its incorporation into the system of machines and the Industrial Revolution, is then expanded, in the same book, to consider the fact that not only that subsumption was already the incorporation of knowledge expropriated from the class worker, but also that the Cultural Industry, in a later period, carries out a similar process of cultural subsumption that is the foundation of its institutional power as an instance of social mediation aimed at domination.

Celso Furtado (1978), in another register, explains that the basis for the construction of bourgeois hegemony in twentieth-century Brazil was the movement of absorption, by the white developmentalist intelligentsia, of the popular culture that had grown with relative autonomy in the favelas and in the interiors throughout the nineteenth century, despised by the then reigning Bovarism. The history of the legitimization of capoeira in the Vargas government is another case of collaboration between black and white elites aiming to establish the foundations of a popular national culture at the service, ultimately, of bourgeois

hegemony. What occurs from this founding period is the subsumption of popular culture by cultural capital, which guarantees the conditions of legitimacy of the capitalist mode of appropriation, to use once again the Marxian categorization emphasized by Dussel (1985). The formation of the cultural basis for this operation, which in Furtado (1984) defined Brazilian civilization prior to industrialization, was precisely the period of the foundation of modernity, with the constitution of the world market after the arrival of Europeans in America, following the dating of Quijano and Dussel.

4.4 Conclusion and outlook

In this line of reasoning, two important clarifications can be made in relation to the decolonial debate. First, given its complex and contradictory character, domination should not be understood merely as a process of erasure, but of subsumption, which involves two moments: one of expropriation and the other of imposition of knowledge (Bolaño and Herrera-Jaramillo, 2019). Thus, the ancestral knowledge of our American indigenous in the field of food will be incorporated into European tables and later returned, transformed, to the populations of the periphery as a legitimately Italian, French, etc. product. In general terms, the movement of expropriation and imposition of knowledge, which involves the intellectual work of indigenists, anthropologists, Jesuit priests and not only the military, is a process of cultural domination that reveals the double contradiction – capital/labor, economy/culture (Bolaño, 2000) – that presides over the expansion of capital throughout modernity.

And here is the second clarification. It should be noted that, in my reading of the problem, it is not a matter of considering, in order to be a Marxist, the factor, or the economic foundation of the thing, but of understanding capital as a totality, a totality, moreover, constructed by the subsumption of externality and, therefore, inherently contradictory since it incorporates its opposite without erasing its identity of origin. That is the germ of the revolution. Uribam Xavier (2026), another participant in the debate, for example, is wrong to try to question Safatle's criticism of decolonial studies, stating that they present modernity in a monolithic way. His answer defines, using decolonial jargon, modernity as "a civilizing project, composed of a particular rationality with universal pretensions, constituted by the colonality of power, knowledge and being, as well as an economic system, the capitalist mode of production, and a political system and a legal order based on natural law." Let us focus on the question, given our limits of time and space, only on the aforementioned "economic system".

Now, defining the capitalist mode of production in these terms is anachronistic. Modernity is inaugurated at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, while the capitalist mode of production emerges with the Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth century. What existed before can be defined, following Braudel's literature, as part of "historical capitalism", when, under the command of large pre-capitalist mercantile capital, the process of primitive accumulation of capital takes place, in alliance with the absolute monarchies and the church, but the mode of production in Europe was still feudal, transitional. Colonialism at this time is therefore absolutist and the capitalist mode of production, in the strict sense of the term, will exist in the form of manufacture in medieval cities, under the yoke of feudalism. This colonialism, in any case, is what constitutes the world market and implements the Atlantic system of exploitation of slave labor, reducing America to a colony and Africa to a reservoir of human hunting for use in American slave agribusiness.

This system will be overcome precisely with the emergence of the capitalist mode of production, starting with the end of slavery, not without struggles, so that colonialism, in the twentieth century in particular, neocolonialism, or rather, focused on the military control of Africa and Asia by the European powers, is another, mere instrument of imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, Lenin (2016) said. But this colonialism itself will disappear after the Second World War, attacked by the Soviet Union, by the United States, the new imperialist hegemonic power, but fundamentally by the revolutionary struggle of the peoples of Africa and Asia. In Latin America, of course, a similar movement occurs, but independence there was already a century old, colonialism had disappeared, but coloniality remained – as well defined by decolonial literature – subordinated to capitalist-imperialist domination, commanded internally by subaltern national bourgeoisies.

It is true that under these conditions a world consciousness is beginning to form in the periphery, which is forcefully presented, for example, at the Bandung Congress. But the forms of insertion in the capitalist world system and the methods of domination at the local level are different in the case of Latin America and the countries of Asia and Africa, and hence the differences also in the conditions of struggle of the peoples and in the relationship with local powers and imperialism. Unification will then take place in two ways: that of the market, with all that it implies, on the one hand, and that of the revolution that Marxism proposes as an alternative to the system of exploitation of capital and imperial necropolitics, which today involves the reconstruction of the socialist utopia. The anthological work of Álvaro García Linera (2010) offers the meaning: the path towards *the universal ayllu* from

the communities; the community form against the value form. A concrete alternative universality.

5. Final considerations

Twelve years after the publication of the article briefly analyzed at the beginning of this text, there is no doubt that ALAIC has grown and has been unfolding the institutional program of 2009, according to the opportunities and challenges imposed by reality, at the service of the development of Latin American thought and international dialogue in its areas of activity. We have seen, on the other hand, that the call to promote a new research program based on the internal dialogue between the working groups that make up the entity, made on that occasion, remains pending. I recognize that it was a voluntarist proposal that clashed with the very reality of the success that has been its consolidation as a representative of the whole of Latin American communication thought, in all its aspects.

Nevertheless, the development of this same thought, critical by nature, was remarkable, with evident reflections on the entity and its working groups. In what interests me more closely, three movements should be emphasized: the impasse reached by cultural studies (LACS) in the face of the new reality of the global system of culture, which is articulated at a global level through the Internet, now under the command of the so-called digital platforms (Bolaño, Martins, Valente, 2022); the growth of the political economy of communication and culture (PEC) in a situation of crisis of capitalism that throws postmodernist illusions to the ground; the unusual expansion of Decolonial Studies (DS) and the like, whose contribution, as I tried to indicate in the third part of this article, opens up new possibilities for interdisciplinary dialogue.

The failure of the ULEPACC project, in the end, did not prevent the PEC from finding the path of expansion inside and outside the ALAIC and the national Latin American communication associations, in the EPICC/CLACSO group and in the constitution, instead of the late ULEPACC-Brazil, of the EPTICC Society, whose internationalization is on the way. The dialogue with the DS, in turn, is facilitated by the existence, within them, of an extremely consistent and sophisticated Marxist perspective, as is the case of Professor Dussel. The OBSCOM/CEPOS group has been carefully studying his contribution and trying to establish a dialogue with the Marxist group that follows in his footsteps. The last part of this text sought to show the possibility and interest of an articulation between these two theoretical perspectives in the ongoing epistemological struggle between an integrated, boastful, techno-deterministic thought, and a critical, dialectical, transformative thought.

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