
Rethinking Latin American Communicology in the Age of Nomad Culture: Transnational Consumption and Cultural Hybridizations

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Abstract

Using the theory of migratory networks and the legacy of the critical theory of the developmentalist models, this article puts forward a critical approach of the deficiencies of certain cultural consumption analyses in Latin America. It aims to develop an understanding of the production of high culture and distribution and reception processes in the transversal logic behind the constitution of migrating multitudes and their appropriation of the media content of global society. This work analyses the Latin American mass media and migrations with the aim of considering current intercultural and transcultural communication from the critical perspective of cultural consumption and reception in the Latin American field of communicology.

Keywords: critical studies in Latin America, Latin American communicology, Latin American diaspora and the media, political economy studies in Latin America

The rapid, transversal changes in the 'techno-informational' production and reproduction devices of modern societies are shaping a new cultural ecosystem whose configuration and organizational logic is both unstable and hazardous. The uncertainty provoked by this situation is understandable at a moment of transition for capitalist society, affecting to the same extent cultural codes, forms of spatio-temporal representation, habits and practices of interaction and public knowledge, and regulation and control models revolving around telematic networks and infrastructures. The transformations of the public domain and dominant socio-

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cultural forms of our 'semiosphere' can certainly be classified as revolutionary. They alter the roots of the relationship between capital, work and knowledge; and, as a result, restructure the links between the social system and the media. In this new framework, which could be called 'Cognitive Capitalism', the study of cultural policies is a strategic task; and the political economy of knowledge a strategic problem of social development.¹

In Latin America, articulating the critical-reflexive capacity of communication research, and transcending the contradictions and obstacles of the dominant mediation model, and the obstacles it presents, is a challenge that should be prioritized. It is necessary to start by reviewing the basis of the theory and emancipatory praxis in the region, with the aim of looking at and giving meaning to the voiding of public rationality, the decentralization and competitiveness of cultural industries, and the progressive commercialization of knowledge. To this end, the idea is to reconstruct the legacy and communicative memory of the critical-theoretical tradition of Latin America.

In the academic development of autonomous Latin American thinking, it is possible to identify three main maturation stages – or phases of scientific research and production – in the analysis of the information system:

1. *The advent of the Latin American communication programme.* In the framework of the theory of dependence and the New World Information and

¹ The transformation of the new context of globalization is summarized in the passage of executive action (coercive) to indicative action (communicative) as an evolutionary process of rehabilitation of social action that accounts for changes in organization and behavior models and the construction of a new subject in the current logic of social reproduction. It is the red thread of history and Western civilization that takes us from Spengler to Huntington, from the instrumental reason of capitalism to the subordination of science to tactics in the process of reorganization of international geopolitics and accommodation of social relations in the era of the social fabric that Negri and Hardt, (2004) and in Latin America Giuseppe Cocco (2006), called the Age of Empire and global biopolitics.

Communication Order (NWICO), political economy was understood as a reference matrix of critical thinking on the mediations of Anglo-American imperialism. This discourse ended up by being dominated by the Keynesian and developmentalist approach stemming from the influence of ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), with authors such as Oswaldo Sunkel, Celso Furtado and Aníbal Pinto (Sierra et al., 2005). The Marxist legacy in the so-called 'Third World shift' of the Latin American school nevertheless gave a new lease of life to innovative literature covering the role of indigenism, the peasantry and unbalanced central-peripheral relations, not only in the world economy but also within dependent economies. In this framework, authors such as Luis Ramiro Beltrán (2006 [1967]; 2006 [1974]; 2006 [1993]) expressed substantial criticism of the information paradigm, proposing sustainable and democratic communication and development models, as opposed to the model of diffusion of innovations. Furthermore, within the framework of the debate on NWICO, the *Políticas Nacionales de Comunicación* (PNC – National Communication Policies), which would pave the way for a theoretical formulation of new proposals and matrices of conceptualization in the field of communication and culture, were defined for the first time.

2. *The conservative reaction.* In the 1980s, after the publication of the McBride Report, the recession and reorganization of capitalism ended up by cornering democratizing discourses and policy-making amid the din of the active liberalizing campaigns of the conservative revolution. Not only did the proposals of NWICO and the PNC fall on deaf ears in UNESCO, but also, on a global level, the markets experienced an intense process of concentration and liberalization that, in the theoretical domain, led to the defeat of the critical theory tradition and any reformist attempt by the academic community and regional public policies. In this framework, the imperialist discourse and cultural dependence were cast into oblivion by virtue of a functional theoretical praxis. A symptom of this shift in the communication agenda and epistemology was the prevalence of the cultural and subjectivist approach to

communication research, with a strong emphasis on the audience and the processes of cultural consumption, which did little or nothing to question the dominant structure of information (Sierra, 2002).

3. *The emergence of the communication memory.* After nearly a decade of neoliberal policies, in the 1990s – above all in the second half of the decade – the historical memory and critical thinking were recovered, and consequently the strategic problems of NWICO were again subject to public debate. Encouraged by movements such as the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, researchers – mainly from Brazil, Argentina and Spain – affirmed the need for a new international political agenda as regards communication and culture. In this context, there appeared initiatives like the *Unión Latina de Economía Política de la Información, la Comunicación y la Cultura* (ULEPICC – Latin Union of the Political Economy of Communication and Culture) which, together with the advent of traditional organizations such as the *Organización Católica Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Comunicación* (OCLACC – Latin American and Caribbean Catholic Organization of Communication) and the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC), made an attempt to coordinate the determined will to advance in a new political direction (Sierra et al., 2005; Quirós and Sierra, 2001).

In this new context, an area of debate and social criticism is currently emerging that centres on the undebated – but not incontrovertible – hypothesis of the civilizing project of neoliberalism. A revision of the agenda and analytic power of Latin American thinking in communication has been restated – not by chance – in the debate comparing cultural studies and political economy of communication. There are three basic challenges facing the articulation of critical theory:

1. The materialist theory of communication should nowadays try to recuperate the issues raised over media ownership. Likewise, an effort should be made to define democratic communication policies, striving to create a fairer international context as far as the distribution of resources and information

flows are concerned. The task of nationally and internationally updating the diagnoses of media ownership cannot be delayed, even more so when taking into account that the concentration and inequalities way outstrip the most pessimistic forecasts of the 1970s.

2. So as to understand their logic, it is not only essential to perform a macroeconomic study of the media, their participation in the process of capital accumulation and state participation, but also to analyse the particular forms of production, the characteristics of cultural merchandise, and capital appreciation in each sector, thus restructuring value chains and rationales of production, distribution and consumption in the Information Society.

3. The political economy of communication should consider an intervention programme that re-forges the links between the academic community and social practices and organizations. The idea is to end the isolation of critical theory from the popular movements of the 1970s, which led to demands for information democracy being transformed into political alibis by the governments in power and into rhetorical subterfuges for more in-depth and radical liberalization of the monopolistic structure of the mass media.

Over the last decade, consumption and reception studies performed in Latin America have experienced a process of convergence and rethinking, centring their efforts on the role of cultural policies (García Canclini, 1990; 2004) or on the interest in defining research agendas in terms of the political economy of knowledge (Martín-Barbero and Rincón, 2009; Reguillo, 2009). At the same time, the aim is to make advances in validation protocols, internal organization and joint work projects that contribute to the development of education and research in the field of communication. To this end, it is necessary to start by appraising the main features of our common culture in the face of scientific-technical and cultural changes and innovations in Latin America:

1. *The rich and complex diversity of popular culture.* The fairs, music, aromas, colours and cultural memory of the peoples of Latin America and the

Caribbean have traditionally distinguished themselves for their considerable creative strength and power. Narrative and anecdotes, landscapes and social spaces tell the story of creative and diverse societies of a complex cultural configuration, woven into social networks based on the art of conversation. The current challenge would be to make an attempt at appraising and reconstructing these popular forms of communication and culture.

2. *The culture of mestization.* Richness and contributions, both physical and symbolic, make for strong cultures and identities due to their openness, original because of their willingness to build bridges of communication with other civilizations. The history of Latin America is, generally speaking, the confluence and crossing of Pre-Columbian and migrant cultures, the production of multiple mediations and creative hybridizations. The difference thus constitutes a social capital and obligatory yardstick in the creation of a constituent power and the possibilities of regional development, on articulating new ways of altering and organizing symbolic capital that, nowadays, also acquires a special relevance among our communities.

3. *Carnival culture.* Festivals are not only a model of cultural representation; from the point of view of the imaginary they also constitute the basis of the political system and socialization that has influenced the layout of cities, university curricula, at a moment when festivals have begun to be codified and subject to regulation. This logic of enunciation of Latin American subjectivity has also permeated discourses and media representations of the communication system.

4. *Scenographic culture.* Generally speaking, Latin American culture is also a show culture, one that is destined to shine and to be displayed and seen. This feature is characteristic of the pre-modern culture of growth, such as that of the ancient cities of the Middle East, whose irregular layout, nowadays, paradoxically acquires a full vitality on connecting with a Neo-Baroque culture and imaginary characteristic of the full screen age.

5. *Participation.* The proliferation of community media constitutes an emblem and mark of distinction of the history of regional communication, which,

because of its importance, has prevailed as a reference even in the scientific domain. The tradition of participative communication, from the popular adult education of Paulo Freire (1970; 2009) to the community telecentres of Luis Ramiro Beltrán (2006 [1967]; 2006 [1974]; 2006 [1993]) and the collectives of popular educommunicators, such as the association Calandria (Alfaro, 2005; 2006), relates an experience and open vision of social communication that is an obligatory reference point for policies geared to cooperation and defining the Latin American regional space. Participative democracy, or the defence of participation as a communication culture, is a strategic challenge, since it directly involves the problem of acknowledging the citizens of weak national states with a concentrated and classist public domain dominated by racial discrimination: large swathes of the population vindicate the right to be heard due to the lack of channels of access and visibility in the institutional information domain.

Culturalism, Capitalism and Mediations in the Age of Cognitive Capitalism

Homi Bhabha publicly addressed the issue central to debate on post-structuralist thinking committed to social change: Is the language of theory just another power stratagem of the culturally privileged Western elite aimed at producing an efficient discourse of domination of the 'Other' through a perverse logic of power/knowledge? Or, as we believe, can and should critical theory revise its conditions of scientific discourse production so as to create a new project of historical articulation aware of its constituent power and the negative effects of the dialectic of enlightenment (Bhabha, 2001, 2)? This reflection points to a number of possible answers to the question occupying the main ideas of social theory, without there being, for the moment, the historical certainty to which the astuteness of reason aspires. We face a doubt that is difficult to resolve at a time, like our own, marked by confusion, shifting frontiers, reduction of differences, mobility and nomadism.

The complex society in which we live is exposed to the uncertainty of permanent alteration and needs to assume the frontier culture because:

the fact of the natural and social world is constantly questioned by our knowledge/action, and the relationship with that which we inherit from the past is also profoundly modified. Tradition is transmitted through the cultural mediation of the mass media; it is continually interpreted using selective criteria and filtered by individuals and groups. (Melucci, 2001, 34)

This logic of mobility and rapid change leads to a false sense of social transparency, at a time when it is more necessary to reduce the opacity of social relations in accordance with reflexive and autopoietic forms of sociability that transcend the limits of theoretical common sense proliferating in the interstices of change imagined by the Knowledge Society.

The problem with sociological imagination moderated by cultural communication studies resides in the fact that it ends up by converting communication into a place for looking at and deconstructing everything, without seeing or understanding anything. Of course, it is impossible to think about reality without mediation, but this presupposes that theory should be regarded as an exercise of translation, as an exercise of radical antagonism, in the sense indicated by Bhabha (2001). The idea is to negate, as a certain communicology theory does, the simple identification between object and political objective and representation, verifying social heterogeneity by means of an active commitment to the translation of discourses in the domain of critical theory; a commitment which is especially important for subordinate minorities and cultures.

The re-articulation, or translation, of elements in contending plural systems is a challenge that should be prioritized in thinking that is open to change. In our opinion, a challenge of the emerging power of Latin communicology has to do directly with this political function of theory as a revealing measurement of

historical tension, the crossings and hybridizations between antagonistic poles, as a mobilizing strategy of the confusion of discourses, which tries to make us aware of the ideological struggles and conceptions that are implicit in this diversified cultural framework: the knowledge production politics of popular culture (Martín-Barbero, 1987b).

The interpretive paradigm of cultural studies in Latin America has opened up lines of research on the media universe and mass culture, verifying the heterogeneous nature of social communication and the contradictions of existing processes, such as globalization, with the aim of renovating the most reductionist theoretical approaches to the complex relationships between communication and culture, on the basis of a multidisciplinary, reflexive and critical framework (Abril, 1997; Ortiz, 2006). According to Martín-Barbero, three shifts have taken place in this evolution process from the perspective of information as an object of research to a plural and complex idea of the field:

1. The first shift marks the step from a transparent conception of the messages transmitted by the mass media to a more profound reflection on the opacity of discourses, breaking with the concept of ideology supported by the ap problematic form/content relationship.
2. The second shift takes place from the folklorized popular to the massive thickness of the urban, which paves the way for research on the reconsideration of the socio-cultural experience of the object-subjects of knowledge, so as to consider the popular as the core of mass media processes.
3. And, lastly, the shift from communication as a media problem to culture as a production space of identities, redefining the field of knowledge in our discipline from the epistemological rupture with the popular, not so much as an object, but rather as 'a place in which to rethink processes; that place from which the conflicts articulating culture emerge' (Martín-Barbero, 1987a: 14). This involves the conceptual renewal of the field of communication, seeing in this a constituent modality of cultural dynamics with which to consider the

meaning of communication practices with respect to the media, social movements and history: from the media to mediations (Martín-Barbero, 1987b).

‘Communication is thus placed as a bridge between ethical, economic, aesthetic and cosmological relations’ (Sodré, 1998, 14). On researching the disciplinary conditions establishing research questions, subjects, methods and objects, Latin American communicology has contributed to a critical – historical – revision of disciplinary partitioning, relating the social forms of knowledge and popular culture production.

Research in many different fields [has] thus been perforating the old unidirectional scheme of communication, diffusive, authoritarian, persuasive, educational, manipulator of empty minds or mass-man, to take a step forward towards a vindication of the receiver which is also that of the capacity of common man to structure the meaning of existence. (Ford, 1989, 80)

The qualitative perspective proposed by this cultural perception of the communication phenomenon calls for a greater understanding of the interpretation of media consumption and the cultural relationship between the media and the social system as an ideological process, as a space of meaning of class differences and dynamics. Nowadays, however, the eclecticism and positivity of results dominate in the process of this comprehensive search. The only aspect of this paradigm, which lends consistency to the different theoretical accumulations of this approach is its opposition to any determinism, so much so that the tacit acceptance of extreme relativism is the only norm common to particular experiences of symbolic consumption by different audience groups.

Freed from the yoke imposed by reductionist concepts in the interpretation of fundamental terms such as that of ideology – whose orientation was at first dominated by the Althusserian approach, since in the 1970s the fledgling school of cultural studies burst in on the scene of social sciences – media culture studies have undergone a significant theoretical change in the most pragmatic and conservative

sense of the word. Theoretical and political integrity have been lost in the rhetorical game of postmodern discourse.

In the postmodern culture of translation (the ductile), the simulated (the reality of reality) and the aleatory, there is a need for comprehensive criticism of its legitimizing link that, from praxis, transforms such a logic depending on the community requirements of social dialogue. It is as well to take into account the need for an epistemological reflection that overcomes the theoretical-practical excision historicizing communication from the perspective of social praxis; that is to say, linking the moment of communication analysis with the need for social change. In this process, the studies themselves that share a culturological approach have been those mainly responsible for the lack of intervention and regulatory strategies in Latin American media policies.

What was once radical criticism of the media seems to have been silenced or deflected to a great extent. Several of the prominent representatives of cultural theory now do not set any example for the regulatory policies of the media. On the contrary, they are undermining them. The result seems to be, on the one hand, a project for a regulatory policy of the media that is increasingly more trite and inefficient and, on the other, a study project and criticism of the (mainly popular) culture of self-compassion, both remote and uncommitted. (McQuail, 1998, 105)

Radical constructivism, the populist vision and extreme contextualism are at the root of such an approach, which has permanently separated the traditional programme of regulatory policy from the cultural strategy of the media. The enthusiasm with which many universities and research centres have embraced the culturalist programme in the USA is, in this respect, indicative of the Realpolitik completely permeating and impregnating the work of cultural studies since their official incorporation in the academia, after having been subjected to a purifying depoliticization to purge them of any glimmer of Marxism and social commitment to the transforming praxis that gave birth to the radical left-wing politics of the region.

Media populism has introduced liberal economic suppositions into cultural analysis to define the processes of communication interaction in distributive terms. In this process, it ignored the historical realities of inequality as regards access to cultural capital, media concentration or the political rationales of info-entertainment and the marketplace. The value of the material dimension of ideology was also disdained, without mentioning the historical separation of social movements and class formations to which the culturological approach of communication and some of the most modern contributions of Latin American communicology were linked from their advent.

In the words of Ferrer (1992), critical communication and culture theory has stopped being a class struggle to become a struggle of phrases. The introduction of cultural studies, as explained above, occurred in an historical period marked by a swing to the right and extreme conservatism both in Europe and in USA, and by profound transformations in the structure of regional information as a result of three interrelated processes:

The restructuring of cultural production and exchange on a global scale, in part associated with radical developments in the means of production with new technologies of information and communication; the restructuring of the relations of cultural production, involving in particular a social and economic repositioning of intellectuals, the specialists of symbolic representation; the restructuring of the relationship between political and cultural power, involving a potential redefinition of the role, and potential powers, of both state and citizen. (Garnham, 1998, 122)

In this setting, the complex articulation of the economic, political and cultural spheres, with which subordinate groups try to define their cultural self-determination, was addressed on the basis of a vague, abstract idea of the beneficial power of the liberal definition of consumption and media cultures. But the political cycle has now changed and research on Latin American communication is again focusing on Gramsci's problem of the re-articulation of hegemony (Laclau and Mouffe, 2004). It is in the age of the celebration of cultural populism that we

researchers should ask ourselves from what perspective do we consider the media and cultural mediations in the face of new cultural realities, such as migrations and cultural *mestization* of frontier realities, and what do we think about this state of affairs?

Latin American Diasporas and the Media

An important part of Latin America lives away from Latin America. Although the USA became the main destination of migration flows during the last century, it was at the turn of the century that the shifts in the global economy and the international division of work favoured new concentrations of Latin Americans in European 'global cities', such as Madrid, Lisbon and Rome, together with the traditional destinations like Los Angeles, Miami, Dallas and New York (Pellegrino, 2004; Sassen, 2001). Over the last two decades, the demographic and socio-political physiognomy of different North American, European and Asiatic cities has become 'Latin Americanized' (Orozco, 2006; Passel, 2009; Pellegrino, 2004; Retis, 2006b; Rodríguez, 2000).² Studies on second- and third-generation immigrants show that 'Latin America grows abroad', concentrating its transnationality in transfrontier circuits that circulate via the open channels of international capital flows, but in the opposite direction and with 'bottom-up' globalization strategies (Levitt, 2009; Portes et al. 2009; Sassen, 2003; Smith and Guarnizo, 2006).

The recent increase of Latin Americans in cities with a tradition of receiving foreigners, such as London, Paris, Toronto and Sydney, has been pointed out by researchers who, in addition, highlight the lack of studies on these minorities among minorities, above all in cities classified as 'hyperdiverse' (Bermúdez, 2008; Block, 2008; Guarnizo, 2008; Price and Benton-Short, 2007; Retis, 2006b; 2010b). The current economic crisis has also favoured new population flows between 'global cities' in this new post-national logical framework of cognitive capitalism. In the last year, for instance, the number of Colombian and Ecuadorian immigrants moving to

² According to the Inter-American Development Bank, Latin Americans in Japan sent nearly US \$2700 million to their countries of origin in 2005.

London from different Spanish cities has increased; these movements coexist with several return flows, above all of Bolivians who have recently emigrated to Europe (Retis, 2010a).

In other words, what is involved are complex mechanisms of movement of workers and their families: Latin American migratory networks are articulated by transfrontier circuits in which the places of origin and destination fluctuate depending on the economic climate. In this context, the analysis of the media from a new political perspective of critical theory is essential, especially in two areas.

The first of these areas is an analysis of media production and distribution in the migratory context, focusing on (a) a critical analysis of the coverage of migrations by the reference media, (b) an analysis of media production geared to immigrants in their cities of destiny, and (c) an analysis of media production in Latin America catering to Latin American diasporas.

Interviews with Spanish and British journalists show the contradictory situation in which media professionals find themselves when covering news about cultural diversity. They are self-critical regarding the media coverage of non-EU migrations. Furthermore, they are aware of the critical situation in which the newsrooms are currently immersed: with gradually fewer professionals with more work, and fewer possibilities for investing in economic and human capital. The slimming down of newsrooms conditions the dependence on institutionalized sources and new agencies. Journalists have fewer and fewer opportunities for specializing in issues of social and human interest. Therefore, the complexities of international migrations, both in origin and in their processes of settling, are hazy for journalists, above all in the Spanish case (Retis, 2006b; Retis and García Matilla, 2010).

The need for information on issues touching on migratory regulation in cities and the opening up of advertising and market niches, promote, nevertheless, the creation of media geared to recent migrants. And in such a way that we find ourselves in an unprecedented situation as regards the production of ethnic media.

A comparison analysis shows that, in the last five years, the media production boom has become a process in moderate decline. However, everything points to the fact that ethnic media have resisted the economic crisis and the transition to new technologies, which probably has more to do with the strength of the advertising market than the need for information and communication among diasporas (Retis, 2010b).

The second area where the analysis of the media from a new political perspective of critical theory is essential is the cultural consumption practices of Latin Americans in their transnational life. Migrants construct the complexity of the transnational condition through their mediated communication practices (Retis, 2006b; 2010b). The increase in transnational audiences and markets constitutes, in turn, an integral part of the complex transnational relations in Latin American families. At the centre of these processes, the new information and communication technologies, together with the new media, are having a greater effect. The transition from the legacy media to the new media is also a central element of analysis in the migratory context. In-depth interviews and discussion groups with Latin American immigrants in cities such as Madrid, London and Los Angeles corroborate the transitions in the communication strategies of migrants who have lived abroad for up to five years. It is the length of the migratory experience, more than the generation gap, that conditions consumption practices of media produced in countries of origin (Retis, 2010a; 2010b). In contrast, with respect to the consumption of new technologies, the implications of the socio-economic context are most significant, for working-class immigrants have less access to computers. This condition does not seem to affect the use of mobile phones to such a great extent, above all in the case of the younger generation (Fox and Livingston, 2007; Retis 2010a).

In the analysis of these communication practices, it is essential to remember that Latin America has always had a hybrid structure, in which contributions from the Mediterranean countries of Europe, its indigenous American roots and the African

migrations have converged. On interacting with the English-speaking world, these fusions broadened:

This is shown by the large presence of Latin American migrants and cultural products in USA, and the grafting of Anglicisms onto the journalistic and electronic languages. Likewise, Latin American culture remodels itself through its dialogue with European cultures and even Asiatic ones. In addition to considering the dissemination of Latin American culture beyond its frontiers towards USA and the Latin countries of Europe – which is very interesting as far as the widening of markets is concerned – it is necessary to take into account the historical conditions of unequal development, in contrast with the Euro-American socio-cultural space. (García Canclini, 2002, 69)

In the search for understanding these new alterities, it is necessary to incorporate reflections that have been made in Latin America in the fields of political economy, anthropology or sociology of culture. Incorporating the Latin American perspective is a pending task for studies on diasporas and the media in USA and Europe. The lack of translations and the even more limited participation of Latin American researchers in Anglo-Saxon academia have proved to be an obstacle for the circulation of ideas springing from the Latin American school. While Eastern thinkers, such as Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, have used postcolonial studies to promote a critical trend of thinking, Latin American researchers have found themselves relatively excluded from the circulation of ideas in Anglo-Saxon academic circles. This is also as a result of a determination of the geopolitics of knowledge that conditions the flows of knowledge/power in accordance with the international division structures of cultural work.

In USA, it is the work of researchers of Latin American extraction that has given rise to a critical posture on Latin Americans and the media. The work of Gutiérrez (Wilson et al., 2003), which has focused on the analysis of the ‘class media’ – as opposed to ‘mass media’ – with respect to the mass media, has revealed the limited access of minorities. Uriarte and Benavides have analysed the disconnection of the newsrooms with regard to the cultural diversity of society (Uriarte et al., 2003). Subervi (2008) focuses on political participation, while Dávila (2001) puts the

accent on the advertising market. Valdivia (2010) stresses the weight audiences have, while Martínez (1998) analyses the perspective of gender.

In Europe, Latin American researchers have mainly been responsible for vindicating the analysis of Latin American migrations from a critical, transnational and transatlantic perspective. The Migrant Researchers Interdisciplinary Group (GIIM), for instance, has promoted several research projects focusing on the transnational condition of Latin American families, women, youth and children. The analysis of the impact of migratory flow control policies, and the discriminatory discourse in the condition of transnational living, have become central to this type of critical perspective (GIIM, 2010).³ Research on Latin American diasporas and the media in Europe is progressively making a place for itself. The majority of these studies have been promoted by doctorate students of Latin American extraction. Only initiatives like those of this publication allow Anglo-Saxon academia to have more direct access to the critical lines of research which have emerged over the last few decades in Latin America.⁴ But the pending task of studies on communication and culture is still to appraise the advances and socio-critical potential of Latin American communicology.

The Research Agenda

Research on communicology in Latin America must take into account at least six basic points, in the way of an agenda or scientific challenges in the region, so as to boost its antagonistic potential for renovating the critical tradition characterizing it.

³ Some of these projects are available on: www.giim.wordpress.com

⁴ In this sense, the academic discourse has fallen behind the commercial and political discourse, which, since the 1990s, has favoured channels of exchange and dialogue between the European Union and Latin America. Six meetings have been held between the EU and Latin America. The commercial channel has been the most fruitful, although, at the last meeting held in Madrid, the need for establishing lines of cooperation and support for the human rights of Latin American immigrants in Europe was broached (see: http://ue2010.biz/en/cumbre_ue-alc/historia/index.html) accessed May 7, 2011.

(1) In the age of struggle for cultural diversity, Latin American communicology must approach academic research in a different way. Intellectual communication should not only modify the role of mediator of information professionals. The awareness of this diverse and heteroclitic reality, above all, points to the need for a different research structure and culture, changing completely our habits of reasoning and socialization of knowledge. Modern scientific culture has operated according to a monocultural scientific logic, denying the intersubjective and dialogic dimension of human knowledge, by virtue of an objective and positive concept of reality, with a nonexistent or scant intersubjective and contextual linguistic reflexivity.

However, a multicultural epistemology presupposes that all reality is the product of social construction, that all knowledge implies a position of observation, culturally relative and the result of a process of interpretation and appropriation of the world which ought to be discussed as a possibility and considered politically. Migrations and intercultural communication contest, in this sense, the epistemological frames of communication as a science, even managing to constitute a powerful historical analytic tool of the Information Society.

In this process of transmission, the power of global information and communication has resulted in new lines of social delimitation and inequality that should be reconsidered, when taking into account that the contemporary conflicts of postmodern society revolve around the production of information, and its difference and functional corroboration. At the same time, it contradictorily allows for potential margins of autonomy and liberation, as well as voiding the operational logic of symbolic assets of content and uniformizing it.

Now, if alterity is an issue of social production of difference, separation and opposition at a level of social or identity representations, by means of the symbolic mediation of the information industry, a society organized around information and knowledge should, in addition, consider how to theorize mediations, how to define information globalization.

The multicultural challenge of communicology should be understood as an economic-political problem of knowledge inevitably linked to intellectual commitment as a part of a reflexivity device of current rationales of social classification and distinction. The systemic centrality of information and communication really poses a basic epistemological dilemma for the academic world: the social utility of theory helping communication. If, as mentioned above, the political economy of knowledge is the basis of the social regulation of globalized imperial capitalism, the intellectual commitment to the egalitarian re-appropriation of symbolic production serving fringe minorities is unforgivable. Articulating spaces of dialogue and intercultural meeting places so as to globally redefine the political agenda of communication, based on a more plural concept of public liberties, is in our time the most important condition for modifying the rationales of ethnocentric domination in contemporary intercultural communication.

(2) Due to its own constituent logic, alterity has the virtue of encouraging thinking about cultural praxis itself, which in Latin America must be re-politicized. If, as Bauman (2001) has stated, one is born with definitions, but identities are built, it seems logical to think that these can be modified and that, historically speaking, a process of symbolic production of tradition has taken place; a logic of constituent observation that can be reformulated. The transversal nature of information flows in the current communication ecosystem does not only verify the emergence of a new transcultural communication framework, based on a combination of cultural values, attitudes and repertoires, defining a new imperial order of flexible accumulation which transcends and reduces the importance of stable regulatory frameworks and national frontiers due to the corrosive action of digital nomadism. The irreverent and opportune vision suggested by Bauman encourages us, in addition, to think that the consistent knowledge of mediation ought to be undertaken from alterity, from the fringes, since:

it is belonging to a field – the unbalanced position – which allows us to decipher the truth and denounce the illusions and errors by which we were made to believe (the adversaries make us believe) that we are in an ordered and pacific world. (Foucault, 1992, 61)

The new context of complexly diversified relations, imbricated at a local and global level, thus revives and shifts the frames of human observation and appraisal, which requires thinking to have a nomadic and uncentred approach. This of course involves moderating ethnocentrism and developing dialogic forms of reflexivity. In short, as Rodrigo Alsina recommends, this implies reinforcing an ethnic position based on and rooted in the responsibility of our constructions of the world and the actions accompanying them. 'It is not therefore possible to seek protection in the inescapability of an objective, universal, ahistorical, innate, and immutable reality' (Rodrigo Alsina, 1999, 63).

(3) A university project for intercultural communication in Latin America is impossible without a politicization of cultural teaching and practice in information mediation. Such reasoning seems obvious since it places us in the logical setting of social reality and the alternative possibilities existing in our region. But it is important to underline such a vindication in a context of depoliticization and generic a-criticality of Latin American communicology that, de facto, ignores or avoids considering evidence that, for example, contemporary information globalization takes place in a context of asymmetric structuring of the communication configuration processes of the Knowledge Society. In-depth critical analysis of cultural asymmetries and imbalances in information globalization could be useful, in this sense, for performing an internal analysis of the power relations that the practice of training communicators currently has, evaluating the meaning and emancipating will of teaching and social research; both of which are issues that have been forgotten in the last few decades by culturalism and communicological neo-functionalism.

(4) All policies for the university education of communicators should also constitute a policy of memory, a struggle for reconstructing history as a utopian projection of the citizenry. Since Foucault put the accent on the function of knowledge, in relation to the knowledge/power devices and policies of truth, it is impossible to consider the apparatus of information and historical development independently of the operations and strategies of power through the representations of knowledge, which obliges us to consider the problematization of the normalized and stable relationships between the control and production systems of scientific discourse. In this respect, the cultural difference illustrates the ambivalent problem of affirmation and negation that crosses the binary dimension between past and present, between tradition and modernity, between cultural representation and practices, for which reason all meaning is repeated, translated and readapted from tradition and historical memory to strategies of authority and cultural identification. As Alberto Melucci advises:

all we can project towards the future is already inside the system of current social relations, in the exchanges, the capacity of representation, decision and imagination that these relations make possible. The past also becomes a general narrative and the memory is constructed increasingly more inside contemporary media systems. The conservation itself of the past, both material and symbolic, depends increasingly less on casual factors and increasingly more on social choices and decisions. (2001, 31)

The genealogy of political economy of intercultural communication reveals the importance of the memory struggle, the vindication of historical forces that facilitate cultural coexistence in which university education plays, if one might say so, a decisive strategic role in the future of cognitive society. In the current capitalist model of information regulation, the university is a strategic space of social definition of the power and control relations of individual and collective identities, which, generally speaking, tend to transform tradition, cultural memory and intelligence into a fetishized image of dominance relations. Nevertheless, unlike in other historical periods, nowadays the transmission of the vision of 'Self' and 'Other' takes place in an unprecedented process of decontextualization, commoditization

and spoliation of the collective memory by sophisticated external systems of electronic storage and reproduction (García Gutiérrez, 2004. This fact requires us, as specific intellectuals or committed lecturers, to perform a continuous task of reconstruction; all things considered, a task of decomposition, reconstruction, criticism and inversion of the common sense of the socio-cultural references deposited as *culturemes* in the digital and collective memory of Latin America.

(5) Communication pedagogy should, therefore, be practised as a reconstruction of common sense to:

liberate culture from its dominant image, denouncing the asymmetry that it reflects and, on the basis of recovering the possibilities oppressed in its process of asymmetric configuration, showing that in all cultures (at least at the level of their dominant image or stabilized order) it does not only generate the 'Self', but also the exculturation of possibilities that could be just as characteristic. (Fornet-Betancourt, 2003 : 23)

In the case at hand, as a cultural region, this means paying attention to other occluded modernities, other wasted experiences, other denied meanings and discourses.

(6) Intercultural communication pedagogy really involves learning the language of links, educating in dialogic ethics and the culture of information solidarity, organizing networks of liberation and public expression of cultural diversity and difference. The social network, as a more or less formalized set of social relations, is useful for describing and abstracting forms of interaction between the elements of a particular system: in social movements, health or educational systems, local communities, population groups or private institutions. The network analysis thus introduces an analytic perspective that addresses the structural relations among individuals (elements) and social collectives (whole), centring on the codified patterns of relations with respect to the aggregated characteristics of individual units, complex network structures, frontiers and intertwined links, reciprocal relations and the allocation of especially relevant power, dependence and

coordination roles, as an object of observation and social intervention, in the current model of information command (Sierra, 2002).

According to Negri and Hardt:

The general outlines of today's imperial constitution can be conceived in the form of a rhizomatic and universal communication network in which relations are established to and from all its points or nodes. Such a network seems paradoxically to be at once completely open and completely closed to struggle and intervention. On the one hand, the network formally allows all possible subjects in the web of relations to be present simultaneously, but on the other hand, the network itself is a real and proper non-place. The struggle over the constitution will have to be played out on this ambiguous and shifting terrain. (2004, 155)

This accounts for the configuration of an uncentred, non-hierarchical, rhizomatic network that offers the complete deterritorialization and horizontalization of the social space as an alternative to development; all the more when the new information and communication technologies currently allow for constructive cultural autonomy, extracting human action from traditional determinations of time and social space. This permits the materialization of a generative logic of research activity that depends on its commitment to a democratic, participative and self-managed communication model, based on a culture of dialogic development, culturally dynamic and inspired by the language of links. The challenge facing the university and research activity is, in this sense, to favour forms of media intervention and appropriation for the social expression and development of cultural minorities and migrants, creating, for example, telecentres and dispersed experiences of organizing information, solidarity and exchange networks that link the migrant population to broader collectives of communication and popular education.

In this respect, we understand that the struggle for hegemony depends on the production of symbolic alternatives, antagonistic projects of differentiation and

opposition that, to be secure, compete and are in contact with the dominant forms of identification.

It is this side-by-side nature, this partial presence, or metonymy of antagonism, and its effective significations, that give meaning (quite literally) to a politics of struggle as the *struggle of identifications* and the war of positions. It is therefore problematic to think of it as sublated into an image of the collective will. Hegemony requires iteration and alterity to be effective, to be productive of politicized populations: the (non-homogeneous) symbolic-social bloc needs to represent itself in a solidary collective will – a modern image of the future – if those populations are to produce a progressive government. (Bhabha, 2001, 10)

And, to this end, Latin American communicology research, communication researchers and lecturers must act radically: as an authentic intercultural mediator. Paradoxically, the problem resides, however, in how thinking and critical theory can articulate – in this age of scientific colonization – a discourse and consider an ‘Other’ that re-links and updates the untimely power of theory as an emancipating praxis and that, in our case, contributes to a diagnosis and radical transformation of the communication universe, laying the foundations for a new critical approach in the general context of the informatization and colonization of the spaces of life, and of the deepening of inequalities and the international division of intellectual work.

The scope and magnitude of these pending tasks raise again the need for reformulating the work of intellectuals and researchers in communication, both from the point of view of the logic of scientific organization and production and, of course, taking into account the agendas and commitments to Latin American cultural citizenry, recuperating, among other tasks, some of the epistemological matrices characterizing the design methodologies serving community development in the 1970s in the construction of commons that nowadays faces a post-national reality and new clusters and convergent systems of information, technology and knowledge. In other words, in this process of intervention the moment has come for politics, reinventing our theory and thinking for social change, favouring a new culture of cooperation that guarantees the principles of understanding and

intercultural communication so that, from diversity, we can advance towards unity of effort and the development of our cultural industries.

The implementation of initiatives like SOCICOM in Brazil or the Latin American Confederation of Scientific Associations in Communication point towards a concerted bid for the idea of a new federalism that permits autonomy and unity of action in the projection of the cognitive capital of our region beyond its frontiers. But we have hardly advanced in the collegiate work of knowledge production and, therefore, should start to consider changing our research culture. In the current global setting, it is necessary to construct new praxis and cultural fronts, creative spaces of collective intelligence serving the emancipation and progress of our peoples along the complex lines of articulating the institutional precariousness and uncertainty of the mysticism of the South American Community of Nations

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