

ALTERNATIVE WEB JOURNALISM, HUMAN RIGHTS AND DECOLONIALITY: theoretical approaches to think about innovative perspectives for the production and circulation of journalistic content


WEBJORNALISMO ALTERNATIVO, DIREITOS HUMANOS E DECOLONIALIDADE: aproximações teóricas para pensar perspectivas inovadoras de produção e circulação de conteúdos jornalísticos.

WEBJORNALISMO ALTERNATIVO, DIREITOS HUMANOS Y DECOLONIALIDADE: aproximaciones teóricas para pensar perspectivas innovadoras de producción y circulación de contenidos jornalísticos.

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ABSTRACT:

This article proposes to articulate ideas and theoretical reflections that, even located in the field of human and social sciences, were still far from an intersection with the specific field of communication, in particular, alternative web journalism. In this sense, we align three concepts (alternative journalism, critical theory of human rights and decoloniality) with the objective of tracing an epistemological theoretical path capable of offering subsidies for thinking and researching innovative perspectives of production and circulation of alternative journalistic content. We thus present the connection points between these concepts, which are configured as elements of complementarity to reflect these practices in their plurality, from the historical, political and social aspects.

KEYWORDS: Alternative journalism; Human rights; Decolonialities; Innovation.

Introduction

The studies on production and circulation of alternative content, especially on internet, almost inevitably include the most innovative theoretical lines. An innovation which, on the one hand, is not necessarily connected to advances in communication and information technologies and, on the other hand, is related to new forms of production that confront hegemonic logic. In this sense, while innovative, we propose the perspectives of ruptures in the discussions on subordinated cultures and people over the centuries, such as decolonial studies, one of the focus of this research.

According to Nascimento (2018), we point to the fact that scientific discussions are still strongly marked by positivism (and its consequent demands of a supposed neutrality and universality), contributing to the maintenance of perspectives aligned with hegemonic logic of contemporary capitalism.

In this context, articulating different theoretical perspectives have brought us closer to a possibility of understanding of contemporary phenomena of alternative

journalism, to the extent that it broadens our fields of perception and innovation. According to Cruz (2017), this initiative might become an option for an unattached experience of journalism (although only to a certain extent) of hegemonic apparatuses control. "An action that engenders language, technique and practice of another experience within communication, with multiple training to become a narrator absorbing stigmas and behavioral patterns from his place, from the colonial difference" (Cruz, 2017).

This article presents a proposal of theoretical approaches among Alternative Journalism, Critical Theory of Human Rights and decolonial thinking. Our objective here is, therefore, to investigate whether and how these approaches might offer paths to think and implement innovative perspectives for the production of a less unequal journalism in the current context.

Methodologically, this is a research that is strictly established in the theoretical field, however it starts from observations of empirical phenomena and seeks, in the intersection of these reflections, to present arguments which may serve as a subsidy for future researches in the field of alternative web journalism and decolonial communication. We consider, in accordance with Pedro Demo (2000), that theoretical research is "dedicated to reconstruct theories, concepts, ideas, ideologies, controversy, notably in immediate terms, to enhance theoretical foundations". (Demo, 2000, p. 20). Thus, we do not present a direct intervention in reality, but possible paths (one more path among many) for other interventions in this field.

In this regard, in the first topic of the text, we address the concept of innovation and how it has been incorporated into journalistic processes and products. Subsequently, we have given consideration on the potentially innovative approaches among alternative journalism, critical theory of human rights and decolonial thinking, while using mainly the literature review of the works of Peruzzo (2017), Freire (1987), Kaplún (1985), Flores (2009), Quijano (2000), Villanueva (2017), Torre (2018), Mignolo (2017, Silva (2017), Palácios, Barbosa, Firmino and Cunha (2015).

1. Innovation in the production of contemporary journalism

If there is a consensus regarding the idea of innovation is that it is really difficult to define and quantify it. As highlighted by Palácios, Barbosa, Firmino and Cunha (2015), just as the issue of quality, in addressing this innovation, we are faced with a huge and complex variety of typologies, indicators and measurement scales, in addition to a vast literature and different areas of knowledge.

Furthermore, difficulties are added since several studies on innovation remain restricted to overly specific areas of application. At the extreme limit we simply have the rejection of any attempt to define or circumscribe the concept because, according to a survey conducted by Grubenmann (2013), few authors explain what they understand by innovation when debating the issue in any scientific publication. Such scenario tends to perpetuate the difficulties and inconsistencies related to the concept, hence generating overlaps and redundancies and compromising the construction of more consensual typologies and definitions.

Fernandes and Silva (2019) remind us that in the last century, innovation was inserted into society within the imaginary of progress, that is, it was directly associated with increased efficiency and productivity, which came to be understood as useful for producing a better course of things. "Innovation, in this context, was an instrumental apparatus for deep and permanent changes that produced advancement and progress" (Fernandes & Silva, 2019, p. 19).

Thus, its concept gains strength with technological development, in further aligning the idea of "useful action", that is, an invention or discovery that may be applied and commercialized. The pose of innovations was generally reserved for an intellectual aristocracy or technicians with scientific expertise (Fernandes & Silva, 2019). A scenario that led to the following configuration:

Innovation is an instrument of power, becoming a tool of social prestige, political and economic power. By joining at public policies and government agendas, it becomes an instrument of industrial competitiveness, military and political power, and national sovereignty; for large companies, innovation also means competitive advantage within the market (Fernandes & Silva, 2019, p. 22).

These historical aspects, though concise, denote the economic dimensions to which this concept has been worked throughout history. However and due to this complex panorama, we aim at delimiting what we understand as innovation aligned with decolonial perspective, though with no intention of exhausting the subject of such enormous magnitude or even proposing definitive concepts which adjust the many edges under this debate.

Thereupon, our connection point for this work (we could not say starting point, since it is a decolonial research which suggests more circularity or a turning point than the "already seen and already given" than a starting point, so we say connection, because it is the point that leads to others) starts according to Rogers (1983), considering innovation as an idea, practice or object that is perceived as new. In other words, what it

is really important is the perception of the novelty by the individual, regardless of the time lapse between this perception and the first use or innovation discovery. Thus, innovation, in the meaning we intend to attribute to the term in our studies does not (necessarily) involve major ruptures and discontinuities. As suggested by Palacios, Barbosa, Firmino and Cunha (2015, p. 14):

Innovation does not necessarily imply ruptures or abrupt discontinuities, though such events may occur. In some cases, it may be presented in the form of successive waves of changes and upgrades that work as a continuous and gradual development of a product or production methods.

Moreover, it is important to consider that the development of digital technologies communication has been a combination of innovations from different segments, such as the products, processes, the market and forms of use (Steinbock, 2005; Tourinho, 2010). In the specific field of internet, especially in web journalism, this reality is not different, demanding a distinct treatment communicational content (Cabrera González; Bernal Triviño, 2011; Gonçalves, 2009).

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that current innovations alternate periods of innovation with depression (Fling, 2009). The challenge, therefore, it is not only technological, but above all, it lies in the potential for appropriating and incorporating innovations in contents produced for the digital medium (Cebrián Herreros, 2003; López, 2006). After all, according to Grubenmann (2013), the exponential progress of the digital unleashed change processes in all social systems, with media system being one of the most affected. To continue fulfilling its functions of effectively informing, commenting and entertaining on the possibilities of the digital context, web journalism thus requires taking innovative paths (Rusch, 2010).

In view of this panorama, it is evident, in accordance with Rossetti (2013), the need and relevance for innovation to be increasingly discussed in the academic and scientific spheres, in different knowledge areas, including within the framework of Communication and Journalism, as proposed in this article. This approach enables an observation in innovation process in a more wide-range and complete scope, which begins with the identification of the problem, generates a research and development of a possible solution, which may result in the dissemination of changes in the products and journalistic processes (Rogers, 1983).

From the conception of innovation exposed so far, we consider innovation, either the effect or the act of innovating. That is, in conformity with Rossetti (2013), innovation is, in this research, conceived as a noun, (the new) and as a verb (to innovate). The new,

however, does not need to be something that has never been seen before. It may also be something viewed by other perspectives. Innovation is also to see through different eyes, in opposing to dominant discourses, even without completely discarding with hegemonic logic (Fernandes & Silva, 2019). This is because, as stated by Silva (2016), a society operates through its institutions and hegemonic institutions shape hegemonic cultures difficult to break, such as the way colonialism excluded ethics from innovation process to create (and develop) a universal model of an ideal capitalist society to westernize the world (Silva, 2017).

Only counter-hegemonic, ethical institutions must give birth to an 'other' cultural order, pregnant with indignation and hope, the midwives of another society, whose worldview is radically different from the previous one, with emancipatory implications for their systems of education, communication, cooperation, research, extension, in short, innovation (Silva, 2017, p. 355).

Thus, to obtain innovative news content, it seems clear that the path would be the development of a new professional culture for journalists, in order to stimulate a mindset that subverts the values established by traditional media. This, however, is not a simple task, because the diversity is not usually appreciated in journalistic practice. While experiences outside of conventional media or even outside of what is traditionally seen as journalism (Gynnild, 2014), alternative media are generally ignored or neglected. "Journalism seems to ignore or depreciate what could be its most valuable seed for a change" (Schudson, 1998, p. 31). As proposed by Jenkins (2008, p. 326):

The power of alternative media is that it diversifies; the power of broadcast media is that it amplifies. That is why we should be concerned on the flow between them: expanding potentials for participation represents the greatest opportunity for cultural diversity.

It is therefore up to the University to promote researches in that respect and propose changes, some of the challenges of this research. In agreement with Bolaño and Brittos (2007, p. 293), it is increasingly important "to think in an articulated manner with communication, computerization, education, science-technology and culture policies, aiming the preservation and development of diversity". It is essential to combine efforts to make innovations represent, above all, a reduction of inequalities in every sphere they are inserted, an issue we raise in the following topic.

2. Approaches among alternative journalism, Critical Theory of Human Rights and decolonial thinking

The concept of Alternative Journalism is primarily employed in this research based on the ideas of Cicília Peruzzo (2017), Paulo Freire (1987) and Kaplún (1985), aligning their reflections with other Brazilian and Latin-American authors. It may be characterized as every means that, in a context marked by the existence of privileged sectors in power, adopts a resistance and struggle position against the dominant discourse. On the word of Peruzzo, historically, the ideological-political position of this type of communication in Brazil is of a contesting nature to the status quo and serves as a channel for the expression of organized subaltern sectors of the people in order to obtain answers to their demands (Peruzzo, 2017).

Subsequently, when it comes to Alternative Journalism, we talk about plural ways of conduct within communication which, due to its more general characteristic connected to the idea of social transformation, are conceptually close (and also practical actions – products and processes) to the idea of communication people and community. We could go further, by proposing another conceptual approach, with the idea of counter-hegemonic communication to the extent that the reasons that lead to the emergence and action of these alternative, popular or community media seem to be organically closer to a struggle for a counter-hegemony, of a “battle for obtaining a new consensus, more favorable to the subaltern classes, where these collective social actors come from” (Malerba, 2014, p. 9).¹

It is, therefore, a space of collectivity, horizontality and dialogue. Paulo Freire (1987), although he was not focused on thinking on a communication theory, he is the one who helps us better to understand the pillar supporting these ways of conduct within communication.

Self-expression, expressing the world, implies communicating. From the original intersubjectivity. We should say that the word, more than an instrument, is the origin of communication – the word is essentially dialogue. The word opens consciousness to the common world, therefore in dialogue. Along with this line, the expression of the world is embodied in the elaboration of the world and the communication in collaboration (Freire, 1987, p. 13).

¹ However, this is not the focus of this article, since the issue of hegemony and counter-hegemony has already been addressed in previous articles related to the research.

In "*Pedagogia do Oprimido*" ("Pedagogy of the Oppressed"), Freire presents an education model which has dialogue as its key element. A people-centered model and with emphasis in the process. Its origin, though added to European and North American pedagogical and sociological contributions, comes from Latin America. He offers an education for the liberation of oppressed and subaltern sectors.

This education model aims to train people so they might be able of transforming their reality. No longer a teacher for a student and a student for a teacher, but a teacher-student for a student-teacher (Freire, 1987). In such manner, Freire believed that everyone (teachers and students) were complementary parts of an extensive process of knowledge construction, which took place horizontally and collectively. Thus, a critical, problematizing, conscious model of education is formed, based on the active participation of the subjects - teachers and students – in the educational process.

Guided by this thinking, Kaplún (1985) reflects on a people-centered communication, thus a communication of dialogue and transformation. For him, popular communication (at this point we may also say alternative) only makes sense through dialogue, horizontality and collectivity.

If, in view of what has been stated so far, we understand that Alternative Journalism is taken within the oppressed and subaltern sectors based on their specific demands and general ideas of social transformation, a road opens up to dialogue on a proposal for conceptual approach with Critical Theory of Human Rights, understood as a process that is constructed from the struggle of oppressed and subaltern sectors (Herrera Flores, 2009).

For Herrera Flores (2009), the definition of Human Rights has human dignity as a central premise, as well as all the victims of violations or those who are systematically excluded from the processes and affirmation spaces. "From this perspective, human rights are not confused with laws, pacts and international declarations; on the contrary, they are characterized as object that international norms intend to regulate". (Herrera Flores, 2009, p. 18).

Thus, the objective is to adapt the discussions on human rights to the contemporary context, understanding it as something different from of what is expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Herrera Flores (2009) proposed to think on the human rights outside the impositions of colonialism, looking for answers in peripheral and subaltern sectors, in general, they are those who suffer most from violations of these rights.

A critical theory of law must then be supported by two pillars: the reinforcement of formal guarantees legally recognized, but also the

empowerment of the most disadvantaged groups in pursuing new forms, more egalitarian and generalizing, of access to goods legally protected (Herrera Flores, 2009, p. 59).

Hence, Alternative Journalism, by empowering and answering the needs of oppressed and subaltern groups may be understood as part of what Herrera Flores (2017) characterized as “struggles that human beings put into practice to gain access to the goods necessary for life” (HERRERA FLORES, 2009, p. 28).

Thinking about the Human Right to Communication from the communities, peripheral and subaltern people is a theoretical-practice option that brings us closer to either the Critical Theory of Human Rights or decolonial thinking, in the search for a new perspective apart from colonialist impositions (Herrera Flores, 2009).

[...] the emergence of a critical conception of rights to represent an important opening movement of the legal field to political and social problematizations arising from this contradictory context and still distant from regulatory frameworks, to the extent that legal knowledge and practice need to provide answers to socio-political conflicts still smoldering in Latin America and the world (Castilho, 2013, p. 179).

Critical theory and the proposal for the Reinvention of Human Rights by Herrera Flores (2009) mix elements of decolonial perspective and critical thinking of human rights (Castilho, 2013). Gándara Carballido (2013), in analyzing the work of Herrera Flores (2009) from a decolonial viewpoint, argues that the author establishes his narrative from the oppressed subjects and the criticism to the colonialist dimension of modernity, which is why he broadens his emancipatory horizon.

At this stage, we understand decolonial thinking as a place of rupture; however, this rupture is not necessarily about denial. Balestrin (2013) when speaking of decolonial turn, states that the decolonization process must not be confused with rejection of what was or is produced in the Global North (in general, the colonizers), nor as a unique acceptance of what is produced in the South (in general, the colonized).

We still live in a time of strong theoretical handcuffs, incurred by historical ideologies, on which the leading scientific schools are based, almost uniquely dedicated to northern theories, from “developed countries” – from the perspective of the international indicator. There are ignorance and disrespect in relation to other expertise and, consequently, a narrowing of scientific research (Torre, 2018).

Mignolo (2017) reminds us that “coloniality” is a concept introduced by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, in the late 1980s, so it is still a recent field of social studies. “Decolonial options are an inexorable analytical effort to understand, in order to

exceed, the logic of coloniality underlying the rhetoric of modernity” (Mignolo, 2017, p. 6).

In this manner, decolonial thinking goes beyond colonization process in the direction of overcoming historic and cultural landmarks that the colonizers imposed in the countries remnants from colonization process. In this respect, decolonial thinking does not assume a single direction, on the contrary, seeks to present a historically silenced epistemological diversity.

Therefore, in communication, decolonial thinking helps us to trace the path that detach from the theoretical ties and pre-molded formats, as well as it might diversify the perspectives, retrace, recreate, rethink the ways of conduct within communication and journalism. But this retracing must not be purposeless; on the contrary, it has to strive to achieve an emancipatory horizon. What Villanueva (2017) calls the ultimate meaning of communicational decolonization, “the rehumanization, that is, to rescue effectively and in the broader sense of its dialogical, democratizing and humanizing dimension, once its practical implementation continues to rely on the impositions and asymmetries” (Villanueva, 2017, p. 32).

3. Final considerations

In this article, we are proposing to think of Alternative Journalism using the Critical Theory of Human Rights approach and within the epistemological perspective of decolonial thinking, which raises from a rupture with what has been hegemonically constructed on science and rationality.

What has been said and reflected so far conduct the processes and practices of alternative journalism down the crossroads², where new possibilities of conduct within communication are faced and unfold into other ones. Therefore, generating innovative processes (Fernandes & Silva, 2019; Silva, 2017) in their products and journalistic processes.

If alternative journalism, as argued by Peruzzo (2017) is strongly related to the idea of popular communication (discussed here by Freire and Kaplún) and executed directly by the popular and subaltern layers of society, we believe its practice is configured as a

² By crossroads, we agree with Bião (2009), who defines it as places of agreements and disagreements [...], the home of the existentialist anguish in choosing which path to take or immobility [...]. There, the ordinary routine coexists with the extraordinary events [...]. There all sorts of people cross, including marginalized people who only have a place there.

space of resistance in the pursuit of what Herrera Flores (2009) calls the struggle for human dignity and representing the essence of what he advocates for human rights.

The products developed by the experiences in alternative journalism aim, in the first place, the struggle to survive and complaints about injustice and inequalities. However, while they do that, these initiatives have ended by creating new ways of conduct within communication, in which dialogue (Freire, 1987) and collectivity (Peruzzo, 2017) play a fundamental role.

Thereupon, practices in alternative journalism may be characterized as real practices of human rights. To such a degree, we consider that it is within the struggle to survive, dignity and rights that intersect the connection positions between alternative journalism and critical theory of human rights.

Whether alternative journalism or critical theory of human rights bring the subaltern subjects to the center of their practices (theoretical or social ones), who have historically been invisible and excluded from spaces of dispute over "rights" and the production of journalistic content. This unfeasibility, however, must not be considered outside the historical and social process or based on the so-called development/globalization, once it is the result of them.

Aníbal Quijano (2005) will call this coloniality of power process, that is, the way the West (Northern Countries) dictated relations of power and domination among Southern Countries, seeking to standardize and universalize the ways of life. "America is the first space/time of a power standard of worldwide vocation and so in that way, as the first identity of modernity" (Quijano, 2005, p. 107).

Coloniality, withal, is not only established in relations of superiority of some upon (coloniality of "power"), but also in "culture" (related to social imaginary), in "knowledge" (related to hegemonic production of knowledge) and in "doing" (related to daily life). These four elements of coloniality were articulated by Villanueva (2017), through the ideas of Aníbal Quijano, Walter D. Mignolo and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. Along these lines, in communication, the exclusion of places of speech and the invisibility of subjects and subaltern social groups are coloniality marks.

Similarly, we establish at this moment a necessary triad to think of innovative and emancipatory practices in alternative journalism: 1) the concept of alternative journalism aligned to popular communication; 2) critical theory of human rights; 3) and finally, decolonial thinking. The latter, directing our gaze towards to a different angle, that connects concepts, recreates and reinvents new possibilities of conduct within communication.

Considering these articulated dimensions, we might analyze the productions and circulations of initiatives in alternative journalism from practice to episteme; thus understanding not only its products and processes, but also the motives and social and collective interests which propel these initiatives. These are perceptions that indicate other directions, different from conventional journalism. Nevertheless, it is not something necessarily new, but it may offer innovative elements with a broader understanding, on the proposed theoretical articulation among alternative journalism, human rights and decoloniality at this juncture.

Investigating alternative journalism based on these concepts in isolation might certainly offer important reflections on several social phenomena, as have already been deeply undertaken since the 1960s in Latin America. However, investigating such initiatives from the joint articulation of these concepts promotes a broader and more plural conception of these phenomena, which we believe to be essential for the analysis and conformation of a common agenda that exceeds the limits of theoretical pragmatism and might be actually incorporated as a reality dispute tool, through communication initiatives.

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RESUMO: Este artigo propõe-se a articular ideias e reflexões teóricas que, mesmo alocadas no campo das ciências humanas e sociais, ainda se encontravam distantes de um entrecruzamento com o campo específico da comunicação, em especial, do webjornalismo alternativo. Nesse sentido alinhamos três conceitos (jornalismo alternativo, teoria crítica dos direitos humanos e decolonialidade) com o objetivo de traçar um caminho teórico epistemológico capaz de oferecer subsídios para se pensar e pesquisar perspectivas inovadoras de produção e circulação de conteúdos jornalísticos alternativos. Apresentamos assim os pontos de conexão entre esses conceitos, que se configuram como elementos de complementaridade para refletir essas práticas em sua pluralidade, desde os aspectos históricos, políticos e sociais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Jornalismo alternativo; Direitos humanos; Decolonialidades; Inovação.

particular, el periodismo web alternativo. En este sentido, alineamos tres conceptos (periodismo alternativo, teoría crítica de los derechos humanos y decolonialidad) con el objetivo de trazar un camino teórico epistemológico capaz de ofrecer subsidios para pensar e investigar perspectivas innovadoras de producción y circulación de contenidos periodísticos alternativos. Presentamos así los puntos de conexión entre estos conceptos, que se configuran como elementos de complementariedad para reflejar estas prácticas en su pluralidad, desde lo histórico, lo político y lo social.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Periodismo alternativo, Derechos humanos; Decolonialidad; Innovación.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo se propone articular ideas y reflexiones teóricas que, aún ubicadas en el campo de las ciencias humanas y sociales, aún estaban lejos de una intersección con el campo específico de la comunicación, en