

Ethical-political challenges in the exercise of scientific citizenship in Communication

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Abstract

The article presents a transmethodological reflection on the experience of building academic solidarity networks, for the exercise of a critical experimental, inventive and propositional scientific citizenship. It contextualizes Latin American economic-political and academic reality, and the obstacles that research production and transformative knowledge have to face, in institutions conditioned by the *positivist* model of science. It also argues about the need to build *community* powers that assume the ethical/political commitment to propose alternatives to overcome the *academic neocolonialism*, and the bureaucratic modes of investigative exercise. It works on a heuristic theoretical-methodological perspective, in cooperation with Latin American and world critical thinking.

Keywords: Scientific citizenship. Transmethodology. Academic networks. Critical research. Latin America.

The need for groups, centers, collectives, teams and institutions in order to exercise scientific citizenship: the AMLAT Network experience.

The need for a *collective production of knowledge* led us to organize, starting in August 2002, a *Research Group* named *PROCESSOCOM*, having defined the following categories as the *transmethodological* axes for its constitution and investigative operation: *epistemology, mediatization, mediations and reception*. This unusual articulation, in an institutional and ministerial reality impregnated by a *positivist* paradigm, has established a certain arrangement in terms of complexity that defined *epistemology* as a *comprehensive and necessary dimension* for the set of dimensions deemed necessary in knowledge production processes (MALDONADO, 2019a, 2019b). Therefore, the *epistemology* maintains its gnosiological, philosophical, (meta)methodological, (meta)theoretical, (meta)scientific character; however, it expands itself, in a reflexive critical analytical exercise, from a praxis that runs through all areas of research, from the most operative (technical) to the most complex and [meta] scientific (*philosophical/logical; sociology of science, history of science, psychology of science, anthropology of science, communicology of science*). This definition

has summarized knowledge acquired during thirty years of intellectual and investigative work, among which we can highlight, within a Brazilian context, the *multimethodological* investigative work coordinated by Immacolata Lopes and Maria Aparecida Baccega at the University of São Paulo (USP), which was configured as an academic context that led to the subsequent configuration of a *transmethodological dimension*, within the context of PPGCC-UNISINOS (BONIN, 2011; BONIN; ROSÁRIO, 2013).

This articulation between investigators has generated and maximized the production of renovating, experimental and critical research efforts that raised questions in connection with media and communication processes in the first two decades of the 21st century. The philosophical premises, the postulates, the investigative strategies, the ethical/political proposals, the arguments, the procedural guidelines; in summary, the construction and concrete production of investigations, articulated under a *transmethodological* perspective, have materialized hypotheses and turned them into theses, dissertations, books, articles, reports and intellectual productions that express the consistency, the fruitfulness and the inventiveness of an *investigation collective* that configured a *radical group*, in order to generate a *solidary* and *transformative academic culture*, as a concrete exercise of *scientific citizenship*, as an emancipatory and existential way of acting, and as a strategic ethical/political commitment to life, humanity and *well-living*.

In effect, as of 2009 and with the support of CNPq, the AMLAT Network is organized as a cooperation complex focused on the research, study, discussion and production of *transformative methodologies*; within a perspective of methodological confluence and confrontation in terms of critical investigation. The main general purpose was to establish an *international academic cooperation network* that would allow the continuous sharing of investigation experiences, epistemological problematizations, theoretical production and designs of critical investigative procedures. This main purpose was built in a systematic way by designing an articulated biannual schedule, which included seminars, meetings, conferences, intensive courses, shared classes, assessment of theses and dissertations, integrated projects, the production of books and dossiers, as well as joint artistic and cultural activities, in addition to the establishment of affective/existential bonds, aiming at building other possible worlds.

All this organizing effort has been and is being articulated in the sense of contributing to the strengthening of a *scientific field in Communication Sciences in Latin America* that may be constituted as a strategic reference for a critical production of knowledge in the area and that marks a radical and strategic break from *utilitarian, instrumentalist, functionalist, positivist and conservative* segments within the field of communication sciences. These segments take important roles in the maintenance of a *neocolonial status*, under the hegemony of a US positivist paradigm, strongly conditioning Latin American academic life.

In effect, the AMLAT Network has constituted a *heterotopic community* and a *critical investigative culture*, which provides students, teachers and professors, investigators and the communities in which it operates with productions that generate alternative knowledge, the

production of inventive and experimental research efforts and a horizontal, non-hierarchical collaborative articulation. At the same time, it rejects subordinations and promotes the diversity of transformative investigation initiatives, as a path for a consistent training of researchers, thinkers, and citizens committed to the common good, justice, multifaceted truth, individual and collective freedom, scientific fraternity and the struggle for a dignified life for all of humanity.

The intellectual workers, artisans of investigation, and scientists participating in the AMLAT Network have been producing a relevant set of theses, dissertations, books, articles, chapters, essays, reports and projects¹ on communicational citizenship; educational communication; communicational processes in migrations; transmethodological musicalities; communicational processes of autochthonous peoples; systematic criticism of corporate media formats and genres; alternative and community means of communication; alternative digital communication; critical analysis of media discourses and production; processes of receptive interrelationships between audiences and media; sociocultural/ audiovisual analysis of advertising; educational-communicational processes for community health; mediatization of political processes; community communication; communicational processes of collective organizations and people with disabilities; communicational processes of transvestites; community communication; systematic criticism of hegemonic media systems; corporealities; communicational cartographies; media discursive territorialities; economic-political analysis of control, surveillance and disinformation systems. (PADILLA; MALDONADO, 2009; MALDONADO; PEREIRA, 2010; MALDONADO; BARRETO; LACERDA, 2011; MALDONADO *et al.*, 2012; PADILLA; MALDONADO; GAMBOA, 2015; RIFIOTIS *et al.*, 2011).

In these processes, the exercise of *scientific citizenship* is an essential strategic element for the sociocultural and economic transformations of Latin American countries; unfortunately, this necessary component of educational policies, proposal, programs, projects and plans is poorly approached, poorly discussed and poorly understood. Additionally, it is often obliterated by the systematic actions of institutional/ministerial authorities and lobbyists that are mainly interested in keeping the scientific field subservient to major transnational companies and to companies owned by regional oligarchical elites. In these restriction processes, the Latin American techno-bureaucracies reduce scientific activity to a *productivist technoscience*, functionalized in order to maximize and concentrate profits in a very small segment of the population.

In this reality, there is the operation of extractive mega-companies (oil, lithium, copper, iron, diamonds etc.); transnational pharmaceutical companies (which concentrate most patents and impose legal impediments aiming at limiting free and inventive research efforts in the health care segment); the international financial system (a complex of international loan sharks without any kind of social responsibility); the commercial circuit

¹ Awarded by Capes, CNPq, INTERCOM, COMPÓS, UNESCO and UNISINOS.

of raw materials (*commodities*), especially agricultural products, of which Latin America is a major global supplier. In this hegemonic reality, we have the hard-hitting operation of media and telecommunication holding companies (Globo, Televisa, TELCET, América Móvel, TIM, Telefónica, Telecom etc.), which occupy a central role in the articulation of the power of *capital*, given that *information* and *communication* are strategic sectors deemed essential for the operation of the capitalist economic system, within the context of the current digital/cognitive model. These *multimedia systems* operate as systems of *strategic symbolic production* for the conditioning, surveillance and control of consumers (ASSANGE, 2014; GREENWALD, 2014; MATTELART, 2009; SNOWDEN, 2019). This hegemonic set of economic-political powers has little to no interest in supporting and encouraging *educational-communicational* processes that invigorate and expand the knowledge necessary to solve the structural issues of Latin American *social formations* (DOWBOR, 2020; 2018; FURTADO, 2007, 2009; IANNI, 2000; SANTOS, 2002).

Critical communication research needs to produce basic and consistent knowledge that clearly shows the paradoxes, contradictions, anachronisms, absurdities, incoherences and injustices that support the hegemonic and oligarchical/plutocratic model that leads to poverty, misery, socioeconomic backwardness, racism, violence, educational fragility and all the technical/scientific shortfalls in the region. Our transdisciplinary epistemological configuration demands a constant dialog with various areas of knowledge (artistic, natural, physical, biological, human and social sciences); requires an overlap, with the necessary emphases, for each investigation project; and raises important experimental arrangements and combinations aiming at describing, interpreting, explaining, analyzing, systematizing and communicating knowledge. In fact, our configuration as a *multidimensional* field of knowledge turns the schematic exercise of investigative processes into something unproductive, repetitive, reductionist, and weakening. The *starting points*, the *standpoints*, the *premises*, the *intuitions*, the *movement*, the *dynamics*, the *unstable configurations*, the *processes* and the *communicative existence* guide strategic research towards *transmethodological* designs and formulations.

The epistemological power of *transmethodology*, by establishing the logical/investigative need for the confluence and confrontation of methods (MALDONADO, 2013, 2015, 2019a), by defining the obligation to generate methodological tactics, designs and strategies, in alignment with concrete issues (MARX, 1977; GORTARI, 1956, 1980; MATTELART; MATTELART, 2004; MATTELART, 2009; MATTELART; SÉNÉCAL, 2014; MATTELART; VITALIS, 2015; HARVEY, 2005, 2014), by requiring the problematization (disassembly and reconstruction) of the relevant methods for each research effort; by demanding the production of a specific *methodological conception* for each scientific *subject* which formulates an investigation, by designing a set of necessary investigative stages including an *investigation of the investigation*, an *exploratory investigation*, a *theoretical investigation*, a *methodological investigation* and a *technological investigation*, establishes logical parameters deemed essential for the production of critical relevant knowledge (MALDONADO, 2013, 2016, 2018, 2019a; BONIN, 2011; BONIN; ROSÁRIO, 2013).

The impasses of limited liberal democracies and the urgency of building community-educational powers for transformation

The neoliberal frameworks found in Brazil, in Latin America (DOWBOR, 2018, 2020; PIKETTY, 2014, 2015) and across the globe structurally condition life, existence, operations, production processes, labor relations, benefits, exclusions, limits, possibilities of creation and *modes of social communication*. The *logic of cognitive/informational/financial capital* systematizes and articulates the set of economic/political and social processes of *structural formations* that operate globally. In fact, there is a diversity of configurations in capitalist economic terms, the most successful undoubtedly being the Chinese one (DOWBOR, 2018), which has been structuring a *State capitalism* with social responsibility and a strategic view of a rising world power. Indeed, Chinese strategists have designed a series of processes and strategies that combine *capitalist modes of operation* (*Keynesian, Fordist, liberal, flexible, cognitive, informational*) with planning, control, centralization/decentralization, autonomous regions, administrative efficiency, agility, assessment and framing of the economy under the terms established of the Communist Party of China. This process, carried out over the last 45 years, has been a paradigm in the world; unlike the orthodoxies of Eastern Europe between the 1930s and 1980s, the Chinese strategists have very well defined an explicit line of *State capitalism* in order to build the technological, economic, productive and sociocultural bases for robust strategic transformations².

Conversely, the *neoliberal capitalist* model of limited democracies (lobbyists, oligarchies, plutocracies, holdings and transnational complexes), especially the hegemonic US model, has been, in the last half century, continuing strategies of aggression, invasion, violence, coups d'état (CHOMSKY, 2004), constant reduction of labor rights and designs of super-concentration of income in a transnational plutocracy. The illusion of establishing a *night-watchman state*, proposed in the late 1970s, was shattered due to the *periodic real crises of capitalism*, especially the one that began in 2008, whose self-destructive logic continues to operate, as scientifically demonstrated by Karl Marx in the 19th century and currently illustrated by Harvey (2005, 2014); Piketty (2014, 2015); and Dowbor (2020) in a decisive fashion. The crucial problem is that, nowadays, *unproductive capital* (financial, speculative) (DOWBOR, 2018) is the central core of *economic formations* that are articulated and depend on the transnational power of the United States, which carries out a systematic action aiming at destructing important production sectors (DOWBOR, 2020).

In the current scenario, the systemic convergence of *unproductive capital* and *military/informational/industrial complex* is destructive for humanity as a whole. It affects US and European Union citizens; it also affects, in greater intensity, Latin American, African, and Asian citizens. The millions of human beings who are victims of hunger, poverty, viruses, pollution and diseases are also victims of this model, which concentrates resources in the

² From the 2 billion people who have emerged from poverty in recent decades, 700 million are Chinese (DOWBOR, 2018).

financial, military, informational (control and surveillance) and luxury (mansions, jets, yachts, jewelry) sectors. Simultaneously, this same model denies resources for the areas of health care, education, science, culture, social services, ecology, social transport, citizen technology and full living.

In the complexity of the socio-historical reality, there are differences between the policies of several Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and those of democratic groups within these countries. Unfortunately, however, the predominant systemic actions aim towards *intensively increasing social inequalities, intensifying conflicts, denying cultural diversity, and confronting social formations* that follow models different from the hegemonic model. The peoples who defend their sovereignty and dignity are attacked using *militarism, lawfare, racism e neocolonialism* (disguised as *modernity* and *democracy*). The *lawfare* strategy, systematically used in this last decade in Latin America, has been efficient and devastating, in order to weaken the region's fragile democracies. Such *lawfare* has resulted in the criminalization of social movements, ethnic groups, environmental activists, thinkers, researchers, journalists, democratic political leaders, socio-communicational movements, cultural manifestations and gender movements. Thus, *lawfare* attests the redesign of the imperial domination strategies in Latin America.

In concrete terms, there are extermination strategies directed towards ethnic groups, especially Native and African-American peoples, as well as destruction strategies aimed at populations that criticize the reigning hegemony, daily aggressions directed towards marginalized social segments, democratic activists, LGBTQIA+ segments, environmental activists, religious sectors, poor people and inferior classes. This extermination strategy is combined with *lawfare* legal strategies aimed at dismantling and fragmenting alternative political powers, social movements, active/critical/constructive citizenship and constitutional regimes (MALDONADO, 2016).

In structural economic terms, this set of strategies have been formulated in order to guarantee the interests of *unproductive/speculative/plutocratic/informational capital*, in its devastating process of income concentration and manufacturing poverty, misery, violence, disease and unemployment. Thus, this *plutocratic/bureaucratic arrangement* establishes and maintains the structures of inequality, injustice, unemployment, marginalization, privilege, income concentration, systemic violence and the inefficient management on the part of local and federal authorities. All these arrangements are at the service of a plutocratic, transnational and hegemonic power, which thwarts and hinders scientific work, weakens educational processes, and reduces communicational practices to neoliberal formats, algorithms and modes (MATTELART; VITALIS, 2015; DOWBOR, 2018, 2020).

In this *global* context, the *transmethodological approach* proposes the urgency of building *educational-communicational powers* for the sociocultural, political and economic transformation of Latin American societies. The construction of these powers requires the participation of researchers, thinkers, scientists, teachers, professors, professionals,

technicians and students that design, work in and develop strategic *educational-communicational* projects.

Contemporary reality has shown the potential of *communicational education* when people design plans, programs, projects and organizations that know how to *combine* methods, tactics, procedures, strategies and theories in order to build and carry out *communicational-educational, citizen* processes with a Latin American scope. In order to illustrate this, we have, as paradigmatic qualitative experiences, *Tal.tv* and *Canal Conecta*, which were constituted as fruitful macro-structural projects. However, the conservative and neofascist reaction in the second decade of the 21st century in the region indicates that it is necessary to combine micro- and macro-projects, and that the relationship between them need to be based on *autonomy/cooperation*, instead of dependence.

The historical process unfolding in the first two decades of the 21st century in Latin America has been attesting the immense *communicational-educational* potential of projects conceived and carried out by university groups and centers, as has been the case with the *Communication and Education Center* of the University of São Paulo (USP), in partnership with São Paulo's municipal government. In effect, the benefits obtained for the integral education of teenagers and teachers in public education have been expressive for the existence of a democratic field within contexts of resistance, through the materialization of communicative citizenship processes, based on the school environment (ROMANCINI; ALVES; SOARES, 2012; ROMANCINI; CASTILHO, 2017; ROMANCINI, 2018).

In the same *communicational-educational* line, we have as reference the CEPAP - *Experimentation Center for Permanent Learning*, in Venezuela, which has been giving rise to a relevant educational-communicational culture in broad popular sectors of that country, by defining strategies for an interrelationship between communities and university that break down the neocolonial logic of “Westernized” academia and establish strong, profound and affective bonds with working-class populations living in lower-class neighborhoods, communes, settlements, villages and underprivileged sectors of Venezuelan society. This process of opening up the university, and democratizing education, combining educational-communicational work methods, has enabled the entry of tens of thousands of students from the lower classes to the Simón Rodríguez National Experimental University (UNESR). The central core of this articulation has been the *CEPAP Project Method*, which brings together, in transmethodological terms, a transformative conception that overlaps *ancestral, ethnic, popular, and group knowledge* and critical scientific/academic knowledge. The *CEPAP Project Method* in confluence with *transmethodology* situates the production of knowledge, within a heuristic perspective, in each student subject, as protagonist thinkers who write their history in order to express their talents, capacities, knowledge, particularities and distinctions.

Hence, CEPAP-UNERS develops transmethodological strategies that bring together theoretical and empirical practices in experiences of reflection, assessment, criticism, redesign and execution, through epistemological exercises that establish a dialog with transmethodological guidelines, in the sense of the priority of the human species, life, species,

nature, and the production of knowledge in an environmental harmony with the biosphere. At the same time, the *CEPAP Project Method* expresses its transmethodological vigor in the overlap of an *ethical/political dimension* and an *academic dimension* that problematizes realities, existences, transformations, processes, structures and projects for change, and turn them into a necessary component of academic activity, thus distancing itself from the claim of “purging” of academic life as proposed by *positivism* (VALDEZ, 2011, 2013; REYES, 2011; RODRÍGUEZ, 2010; LEÓN, 2011; PADILLA, 2010, ESPINAL, 2009).

CEPAP Project Method embodies the transmethodological premise that argues in favor of incorporating research as an indispensable praxis of the learning process in its entirety (VALDEZ, 2011; PADILLA *et al.*, 2009; PADILLA, 2010; RODRÍGUEZ, 2010; REYES, 2011; LEÓN, 2011). This premise marks a distance from speculative, rhetorical, bureaucratic, formalist, elitist, utilitarian, neocolonial and neoliberal models and academic practices by inserting research as a necessary axis of pedagogical processes. Simultaneously, it makes research a necessity and a right of every student; it questions the academic common sense, which reduces university existence to the repetition of formulas and recipes manufactured in the USA and in the powerful centers of knowledge in the northern hemisphere. It also downgrades educational activity to the consumption of marketing and trendy slogans, especially those that restrict educational work to the logic of *merchandise*. CEPAP also questions the rhetorical, doctrinal and vertical models that deny the investigative powers of students from lower classes, from marginalized ethnicities, women and gender groups, considered taboo by conservative and neo-fascist inquisitorial morality.

The previous processes are characteristic of a set of *communicational-educational* experiences being carried out in Latin America that allow for the design of systematic actions aiming at strengthening *transformative methodologies* produced within these *sociocommunicational movements*. In this perspective, the historical investigation of these projects and processes is essential in order to build fortresses of strategic knowledge in the region. The *transmethodological* guidelines propose the formulation of *exploratory investigations* in order to locate, record and systematize experiences that are crucial in the first stage of studies; the continuation points out to the execution of a comprehensive *investigation of the investigation* that includes the knowledge that has already been built on the issue under analysis and shares this knowledge with the centers participating in cooperation networks, thus significantly maximizing the conditions for a *communicational-educational* transformation deemed necessary to overcome the prevailing neocolonialism and neofascism. The *transmethodological* aspect also defines the need of every educational/investigative process to formulate/carry out a *theoretical investigation* that generates hypotheses, concepts, notions and arguments that enrich the understanding of *communicational-educational* issues; in this sense, we are all producers of theories, *living thinkers*. (BACHELARD, 2006; SARTRE, 2011; MILLS, 1975; MALDONADO, 2016, 2018, 2019a).

In the same multifaceted, impure, and multilectical perspective, *transmethodology* indicates the need to carry out a *methodological investigation* in the entire *teaching/learning* process; thus, it considers that there are no ready-made, finished, complete, simply applicable methods. It proposes the construction of methodologies, strategies, tactics, procedures and techniques as necessary requirement for all educational/inventive activities, as simple as they may be. Only a committed, conscious, organized and reconstructive problematization of the methods can turn an investigation and an educational process into something that can transform and strengthen solidary, inventive and ecological investigative and educational cultures.

Transmethodology brings together a significant epistemological, theoretical and methodological potential to guide these processes; it draws on Amerindian, African, Asian and European secular historical experiences and knowledge. It feeds on the global critical knowledge (WALLERSTEIN et al., 2001) generated by the knowledge communities with the greatest levels of fruitfulness in humanity. It learns from the vital movement of nature, the planet and the cosmos in their dynamics of wholeness, continuous transformation, collaborative interrelationship, fruitful confrontation, and the necessary reconstruction of worlds. In a scenario such as the current one, of intense reaction of political, ideological, religious and economic anachronisms, the choice for a *transmethodological* approach generates a potential for political/investigative activities that can transform *Our America*.

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