Social appropriation of culture and communication for human rights

Abstract

This paper proposes an update of the demand for connections between Culture (ALBORNOZ, TRINIDAD-LEIVA, 2019; EAGLETON, 2000; CHAUÍ, 2008) and Communication (MORAES, 2016; LIMA, 2012; WOLFF, 2015), which arises as a fundamental need for the proposal of this research, based on bibliographic and documentary investigation, which first seeks to characterize the political-economic and socio-cultural scope of the current scenario, then identifies achievements and limits related to Culture, Communication and their connections and, finally, it presents perspectives for the formulation and implementation of public policies committed to Communication and Culture as human rights, articulated with the affirmation of other rights (LINDGREN-ALVES, 2018).

Keywords: Human right to communication; Cultural diversity; Communication policies

Introduction

The new neoliberal wave - set in motion worldwide and, particularly, in Latin America has brought the collapse of almost two decades of progressive governments in favor of an agenda that articulates (ultra)liberal and conservative elements in economy and culture. Despite the unsuccessful results in recent electoral processes, values such as minimization of income inequality, fostering opportunities in economy; the empowerment of the country’s sovereignty, making stronger the ties between common people; and the maximization of access to training spaces and professional activities, in addition to the inalienable defense of fundamental human rights, including communication and culture, remain intrinsically linked to the forces of the left. In confrontation with this new neoliberal wave, that has been dismantling a State project - right of Law - based on the defense of human rights, essential issues such as education, health, security and housing are once again understood as priorities by organizations and social movements, putting in second plan the role that Communication and Culture play in public policies by progressive governments on the continent.

Given this scenario, this investigation proposes to decontextualize the confrontation of the demand for articulations between Culture and Communication, based on bibliographic research from reference authors who deal with the relationship of these areas with democracy and human rights, in addition to documentary research, focused on the implementation of public policies for the sector. It seeks to characterize the political-economic and socio-cultural scope of this new neoliberal wave, especially in the countries of Latin America. Then, it identifies achievements and limits related to Culture, Communication and their connections and, finally, present perspectives for the formulation and implementation of public policies committed to Communication and Culture as a human right, articulated with the affirmation of other rights.

Facing a new neoconservative order

More than being restricted to Brazil or Latin America, the current neoconservative wave is awakening leaders and mobilizing networks around the world based on a common idea, not only restricted to economic neoliberalism or conservatism of customs. The affirmation of the patriotic sentiment as opposed to the idea of nationalism, consolidated since the end of the Second World War, with the approval of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, as the main reference, articulates an anti-globalist discourse, whose manifestation has already been present in the speeches of Brazilian government officials, Jair Bolsonaro, and of the former USA president, Donald Trump, during the 73rd UN
General Assembly, held in 2019, in New York (USA).

At the same time that they seek to influence and intervene in policies within the scope of the United Nations, government officials and participants from parties and organizations are mobilized around the Demography Summit, held in Budapest in 2019, from which is being proposed an action of a group of countries self-appointed as “family friends”, understood in their traditional model, aimed at increasing the European Christian population. Another articulation of a patriotic nature is the CPAC-Conference on Conservative Political Action, implemented in the USA and imported by the new Brazilian right-wing groups, whose agenda seeks to articulate and reinforce a broad conservative spectrum on several fronts of action. And in Latin America, ProSul’s new articulation, originally formed by 14 Latin American countries, mobilized by the affirmation of an agenda more focused on bilateral interests than multilateral bloc formation. In this way, Latin America appears as a special place with regard to a global reaction, which comprises, in the advancement of an agenda based on the affirmation of fundamental human rights that vary in each country, a threat to be deconstructed and made unfeasible in its potential of social transformation.

Therefore, far from being less worrisome to focus on a particular region, this conservative shift is a considerable global phenomenon, linked to the growing disinterest of populations, and especially the youth, in democracy as the foundation of public policies. For [1]. Democracy could only be considered as the only option for populations based on three elements: the majority of citizens would have to strongly committed to liberal democracy; most citizens would have to reject authoritarian alternatives to democracy and political parties and movements with real power would have to agree with the importance of basic democratic rules and norms. But this, according to the author, is not happening. In several Western societies, the motivations comprise a reaction to the significant advances related to the affirmation of fundamental human rights, on one hand and, on the other hand, by dissatisfaction with the inefficiency of social public policies motivated, among other factors, by the labor crisis accelerated by technological revolution. Despite demobilization for policy-related issues, populations in several countries surveyed by Mounk (2018) have been willing to give up democratic government systems in favor of employability guarantees.

The disregard for representative democracy processes led to the adoption of a significant motto in the European Parliament elections in 2019: "now is the vote". If they were successful in the electoral process, they also live with threatening advances on the ultra-right, articulated by a common platform, coming from bases that take social media as a starting point, although not restricted to them: they understand the manipulation of big data (data mining) for the conformation of algorithms aimed at affirming certain contents and keywords intended for specific audiences [2]. The control of the procedures of these platforms, linked to the traditional conformation of networks and social groups in different contexts, allows the formation of blocks of power that have already been understood As gramscianization of the right, through the assimilation of strategies for building a counter-hegemony based ultraconservative forces (FEBBRO, 2018).

Key theme of demobilization of existing power projects based on this network of socio-technical articulation, corruption as a target does not result in the framing of privileges to certain sectors of the public service or in the identification of common patterns of regulatory capture based on certain patterns that could collectively be established. In addition, the agenda that maintains the exploitation of wealth and natural goods, such as the pre-salt and the Amazon region reinforces the interests of dominant groups that operate outside the continent, reproducing imperialist logic, in which Latin American countries are willing to assume subservient postures. The support of forces capable of offering false promises in the political field or in the Judiciary is inflated by the media, which to a greater or lesser extent did not achieve its democratizing potential, and the content they produce is disseminated on digital platforms that list themes, approaches and origins in reputation and legitimization processes out of the knowledge of the majority of the population, based on interests that are far from being republican.

In this way, not only the recurrent hybrid wars, but the inevitable fake news, promote a mismatch of information and mobilize conservative sectors that articulate themselves for the affirmation and acceptance of discourses and narratives assumed as truths. Even with some reaction, with achievements in some countries, and advances in others, the political center is shifted to the right, building conservative variations from the mildest to the most extreme.

Although discouraging and without offering any perspective, the Latin American scenario offers several challenges and opportunities in the field of culture and communication. For Caballero and Gravante (2018, p. 32), “theories on culture and communication in Latin America related to miscegenation and hybridization help to understand the complex relationship between digital media and collective actions”. Thus, it is necessary to understand such articulations in relation to the recent challenges.

Democratization of communication and cultural diversity

In Brazil, during the Lula government, society has a great expectation in relation to the democratization of communication in the country. However, despite the realization of the I National Conference on Communication, held in 2009, the following years did not fulfill the hopes in relation to the sector. The later debates took place in a timid and restricted way, with little sign of real progress and without taking into account the proposals approved at the referred Conference, made with the participation of government, business and non-commercial civil society representatives.

Since the 1st National Forum of Public TVs, held in May 2007, in Brasilia, EBC (Empress Brazil de Comunicação, Brazilian Company of Communication, for the words in English) was created in October 10, 2007 (BRAZIL, 2007) and regulated by the Law 11652/2008 [3]. Its structure merged the company Radio bras with the stations of Requite Pinto Foundation and its
management comprised a Board of Directors and an Executive Board, in addition to a Supervisory Board and a Board of Trustees, all appointed and dismissible by the President of the Republic. Although it was understood around a broad mobilization, articulating government and society in favor of the structure of a public communication system, its state bonding not only limited social participation throughout its early years, but was also more vulnerable, when the shift change in the federal government, already with Temer and, later, in the Bolsonaro government.

If the process that conducted Temer to the presidency has already opened space for the dismantling of the fragile structure created during the Lula and Dilma governments, extinguishing the broadcaster’s Curator Council, the interference in the Bolsonaro government has been even greater, making it an eminently state-owned broadcaster. In addition to the collapse of public communication and the affirmation of state communication oriented to a policy that promotes the widespread destruction of rights in various social sectors, journalism itself as a professional practice is threatened and alternative communication practices are curtailed by social movements and organizations that have historically acted in the fight against disinformation, as well as in the promotion of citizenship and popular participation.

The democratization of communication is a historic field for the struggle of social movements in Brazil. Concern of social organizations in their daily activities, takes into account the needs of the reformulation of public policies, and considers the diversity of trained and qualified producers to access and exercise control over the mass media, in addition to implementing means of local and community reach.

The struggle for the democratization of communication in Brazil is the result of an initiative that is linked to “efforts to restructure Brazilian society, with the establishment of guarantees for access to public services, work and decent living conditions for all Brazilians.”[4]. According to Murilo César Ramos (2000, p. 93), this struggle would come from the mobilization of a “public opinion endowed with the power to make decisions and give consequences to those decisions, starting, for example, from popular councils and productive organizations where cooperative ownership or other forms of self-management predominated”.

This is a concept appropriated by civil society organizations linked to the movement for the democratization of communication in Brazil, transforming it into a flag of struggle and proposing elements that would constitute it. This is the case of the slogan of the National Forum for the Communication Democratization (FNDC), which translates its form of action: “democratizing communication for the democratization of society”, establishing the need to make communication more democratic as a precondition for the democratization of society, fulfilling a dual role of emphasizing the potential role of communication in the specific struggles of different social movements and the particularities of communication as its own theme, within a restrictive and excluding system, which inhibits an effective participation in its production process.

Other authors link the concept to the Right to Communication. Cees Hamelink (in MELO and SATHLER, 2005, p. 144) shows that, since the introduction of this right by [5], “The right to communicate is perceived by its protagonists as more fundamental than the right to information, as currently international law”. The resizing of article 19, based on the various debates that followed, led to the emergence of the Platform for the Rights of Communication, a group of NGOs formed in 1996, in London, which in turn, in 2001, founded the CRIS Campaign, acronym that means, in Portuguese, Rights to Communication in the Information Society.

Research related to the formulation and implementation of public communication policies in Latin American countries present a scenario of better use of the opportunities provided by progressive governments in the 2000s in a pioneering study, Dénis de Moraes (2009, p.20) analyzed the ongoing change for its ability to “overcome the state's historic lethargy in the face of the overwhelming concentration of the information and entertainment sectors in the hands of a small number of national and transnational mega groups”[6]. Focuses on normative advances to community media provided by progressive Latin American governments, emphasizing Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela, as laws implemented from a complex correlation of forces, in which the agency of counter-hegemonic actors is decisive for the construction of new paths”. Sáez Baesa (2008), on the other hand, compared Spanish legislation and practices with exemplary cases on the figure of the individualized public access of the United States and that of public collective access, around the Bolivarian proposal of Venezuela.

For Marcos Alberto Bitelli (2004, p.168), there is “the great interest of society and the State organized by it in the face of these rights (to inform and be informed), because only a ‘conscious’ human person can have satisfied the service of this fundamental principle. In other words, communication is a right and a duty for everyone.

If, on the one hand, democratizing communication means recovering what is vital in this activity, that is, claiming the original dimension of dialogue and horizontality of communication, the idea of fighting for the human right to communication is directly related to the mobilization of both those who seek to put more directly in practice – activists and journalists, for example, as expanding this right to those who are competent to do so, that is, to society as a whole.

Mobilization for communication democratization in Latin America has shown, therefore, that there are many places to be conquered by social movements, with regard to the full and non-hierarchical involvement of people and organizations. For John Holloway (2003, p. 50)” “the existence of power-to-do as power-over means that the vast majority of doers are converted into objects of doing” and this is not only a privilege of capitalist relations, but also something that social movements need to face and overcome. With regard to cultural diversity, in addition to national and international legislation, analyzes of communication, media and information are taken into account, articulating classic and critical concepts about culture. As José Augusto Lindgren-Alves (2018, p.188 Observed, “In the scope of human rights, cultural rights are the rights of individuals”. Marcela Carvalho (2018) also
draws attention to the importance of culture as a right within the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988.

It is necessary to fight for cultural rights and understand how cultural policies are in Brazil and in other Latin American countries and the place of culture, as it has been studied since the seminal work of Canclini (1987) and by Lia Callable (2013). Margaret he Steinberger (2009) investigates intercultural representations in the media. César Bolano, Valero Brittos and Cida Golin (2010) analyze cultural diversity based on the Economy of the Art of Culture. Chris Barker (2003) works from cultural identities.

By understanding communication and culture as human rights, it will be possible to see how concentration can interfere in society [7,8]. How people can react and demand that there be democratization in the Brazilian media. Technological changes and their impacts on society can be understood from studies by Adilson Cabral (2015, 2019), who analyzes the democratic regulation of community broadcasting in Latin America, digital activism and the importance of digital TV in Brazil and its appropriation by organizations and social groups; Michael Wolff (2015), who sees television as a new and updated platform in the face of the digital age; Luís Pereira Junior (2002), who shows how TV interferes in the Brazilian’s daily life; Laurindo [6]. Who analyzes the control and reaction of the Brazilian viewer; Octavio Pieranti (2011), who studies the role of the Brazilian State in the face of communications; among others.

As verified by Othon Jambeiro (2000, p.15), “the State continues to have a strong presence in all regulatory processes in the region, but the power of national and international media conglomerates in the regulation, operation and programming of the sector is growing”. How to understand why the State does not act and avoids media concentration? How to ignore the current picture? Pâmela Pinto (2017) shows the influence of politicians in Brazilian media groups, even though it was prohibited in the 1988 Constitution; Janaina Aires and Suzy dos Santos (2017) analyze the Brazilian media from the concept of electronic coronelismo. Because, as Vencio Lima (2012, p.34) observed, “Brazilian democracy will be the big winner when the debate over radio and TV concessions manages to break the blockade of the mainstream media and reach the majority of the population” It is vitally important to analyze the current scenario, verifying how media interferes in the selection of information and opinions and how it manages to prevent the articulation between the democratization of communication and cultural diversity from becoming real.

“Public opinion is induced to the conviction that only what is exposed on screens and monitors has social relevance” and what is manifested outside the mainstream media seems doomed to be forgotten or to a low density repercussion [9].

In conjunction with other rights

Some countries in Latin America, such as Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Uruguay and Venezuela, had opportunities to implement democratic public policies in the area of Communication and took the opportunity to consolidate cultural practices and processes capable of weaving a wide network of communication initiatives that strengthen different local cultures. They align not only human rights in the areas of Culture and Communication, but articulate different fronts in fundamental sectors such as Education, Health, Housing, Children and Youth, among others. Traps are supposedly agglutinated, but effectively fragmentary are overcoming, such as topical, unrelated identity proposals to processes endowed with a systemic vision capable of understanding more than instrumental roles for development and social change. They affirm plurality and diversity in their management and production processes, as well as claiming spaces to be occupied and affirmed that incorporate citizen building projects [10].

This reinforces a base that brings together initiatives in different areas, capable of identifying common bases of convergent and multiplatform articulation, proposing an inalienable defense of human rights, including, among them, the right to Communication and Culture [11,12]. Complementary policies, but which in many contexts go hand in hand, communicational and cultural processes are mutually dependent: if Culture gives meaning to Communication, eroding its democratic and citizen potential, Communication in turn of its scope and relevance to Culture, providing common bases of knowledge, sharing and collaboration capable of reinforcing social engagement, contributing to what Marilena Chaul (2008, p.75) states: “if we can think of cultural citizenship, we can be sure that it is only possible through a culture of citizenship, only feasible in a democracy”.

If the globally articulated society in the 1970s, mobilized by a critical perspective of confronting sustainable development proposed by the superpower countries, was guided by local thinking and global action, the 1990s, from the UN multilateral thematic conferences, introduced thinking and act globally. Currently, however, the different social groups that move for common projects in favor of social justice affirm ways of thinking and acting globally, but with their feet in the ground, even when in initiatives that occupy places of living or cultural performance in the different territories [13]. Even though articulated from a common and integrated digital platform at regional and global levels, the human rights movement also assumes communication as an end-activity component of its struggles, not just as a tool or an activity in between of its actions.

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Thus, a possible contemporary reinterpretation of Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, referring to the right to freedom of expression, could take into account the following formulation: every human person has the right to communication processes that contemplate freedom of expression and the
press, the right to information, the right to communicate, as well as democratic media that may guarantee access, ownership, management, production, cultural diversity and the solidarity sharing of knowledge.

Communication is understood, therefore, as a fundamental human right, a determinant and common component of various social sectors, directly related to the construction of identities and the production of meaning in everyday relationships that may contribute to the increase of quality in different contexts and to consider other fundamental human rights [14, 15].

This definition of work, while bringing Communication closer to other rights, underlines the need to recompose other bases for its learning and training process, as well as its professional structuring. The debate on Communication Policies in academia is still limited and peripheral within the field of Communication itself, despite rare exceptions.

Anchored in the formulation of public policies for the sector, this proposal defends and affirms the importance of the territories of social action that appropriate media and products of communication in favor of the elaboration of democratic practices, promoting the management of communication processes in places such as schools, health centers, cultural centers, among others, that encourage not only the appropriation of information and communication technologies, but also the production of narratives capable of building what Martín-Barbero (2004) proposed as alternative cultural communication policies, understood in the “activation of people’s cultural competence, socialization of creative experience and in the recognition of differences and affirmation of identities”.

It is worth remembering, however, that this performance is not exercised, much less consolidated, with the political performance capable of enabling regulatory guarantees and the viability of policies for the sector. In other words, political mobilization capable of guaranteeing more democratic laws is not enough. And precisely because it is a sensitive, delicate and susceptible to discomfort to the dominant classes, the guarantee of the assertion of conquered rights is extremely volatile, as different Latin America countries are experiencing.

When placed as an adjunct or even as a taboo theme in certain local / national political contexts, Communication is no longer understood as a priority / needed theme for the release of energies by politicians, parties, movements and even collectives, these more directly related to the viability of its actions. On the other hand, when themes such as the fight against oppression and the affirmation of peripheral territories are made visible, the theme of communication is diluted to identity conditions, which shift the focus on the formulation of public policies for the area of Communication, even if they understand it, as a constitutive Process of their identities and narratives, beyond the merely instrumental dimension.

Thus, it is necessary to understand the different political and regulatory realities in the area of Communication between the different countries of Latin America, with special interest in the fragility of investment by the State in the consolidation of a democratic system, endowed with strong public-state and socio-community initiatives, in addition to the already well-known domain of private initiatives in the sector. This task has been worked through ProLocal a website implemented to provide necessary information for the promotion of research in academic and social environments, making possible the identification of demands to be implemented in the form of policies to be defined and / or implemented by the different countries [16].

This platform seeks to provide information related to the project, offering a wide mapping regarding local Communication policies in Latin America, especially Community Communication. It comprises the qualitative investigation of the State structures to deal with the sector, the reference legislation and the main social actors that mobilize for the formulation, approval and implementation of its policies.

The available contents frames the website as a platform for academic and social articulation, based on the idea that communication sectors act as an interconnected set, in complementarity and in the promotion of interfaces, as it is through these different ways that the content is intended to be plural and diverse, democratic and inclusive, capable of providing a communication system guided by new visions under debate in society, that values the set of human rights in which the communication is inserted, articulating specific demands of the movement for the democratization of communication and general movements.

Therefore, as a challenge for the affirmation of the role of the State and its constitutive powers, as well as for parties and organizations more distinct from society, the visibility of the different sectors in the formulation of national legislation related to communication, as well as the implementation, the inspection and even the promotion and training of initiatives capable of increasing participation and citizenship through products and processes that reflect the cultural diversity of the Latin American people.

Conclusion
The purpose of this work was to present articulated relations between Communication and Culture as capable of facing the neoliberal and neoconservative offensive that affects not only Latin America, but several countries around the world. Such offensive is based on a liberal agenda in the economy, but conservative in traditions; articulated globally, but openly opposing ideas as a nation and what they understand as globalization, associating them to a role that has been led by the UN in the affirmation of human rights incompatible with their values. Although conservative forces have expanded into articulated political and social organizations around the world, having conquered political spaces, intervening in multilateral organizations and promoting global mobilization events, the affirmation of areas such as Communication and Culture needs to be worked on in conjunction with other human rights, aiming to strengthen proposals capable of offering tools and narratives for the affirmation of policies to combat oppression, corruption and the visibility of territories committed to the affirmation of social justice and democratic societies.
The political dimension of these processes needs to be addressed in the academic and social spheres, including the formulation and implementation of research and initiatives capable of providing qualified tools for training, debate and the performance of people capable of promoting products and processes that affirm the Communication as a human right, as well as reinforcing plurality and cultural diversity within the different territories that make up the multifaceted Latin America.

Reconstructing the scenario of debasement of human rights set in motion by neoconservative governments on the continent is an arduous task, mainly due to the deteriorated social fabric that continues to offer resistance, despite successive losses in labor and quality of life in most diverse sectors. However, it is precisely for this reason and because of it that it is understood not only possible, but necessary and determinant the due visibility for the areas of Communication and Culture in dialogue with contributions capable of restoring democratic meanings and citizens in favor of common life.

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