

# Alignment between thematic research methodology and the decolonial approach: a proposal for Organizational Studies

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## Abstract

The denunciations promoted by the decolonial approach regarding colonial practices that remain active, even after the official end of colonialism, and the criticism that this approach makes to the universality of thought, contribute to the advance of knowledge. However, there is a gap in the decolonial approach over the most coherent methodological possibilities that can be used in decolonial research. Therefore, we seek to contribute to the expansion of choosing methodological approaches in research in the area of Organizational Studies that are epistemologically aligned with the decolonial approach; they respect the pluriversity of beings, knowledge, and territories. We point to the thematic investigation<sup>1</sup> as a possibility of a methodology aligned with the decolonial approach. Finally, we present an example of methodological planning for research under a decolonial perspective in the area of Organizational Studies, which will use the thematic investigation as a methodology. We conclude that the thematic investigation has a perspective aligned with the decolonial approach since it respects the being and the territory, but that it should not be adopted without prior critical reflectivity, i.e., as a formula.

**Keywords:** Decolonial perspective. Thematic research. Methodology.

## *Aproximações entre a metodologia da investigação temática e a abordagem decolonial: uma proposta para a área dos Estudos Organizacionais*

### Resumo

As denúncias promovidas pela abordagem decolonial a respeito de práticas coloniais que permaneceram e permanecem ativas, mesmo depois do fim oficial do colonialismo, assim como a crítica que esta abordagem faz à universalidade do pensamento, contribuem para o avanço do conhecimento. Por outro lado, existe na abordagem decolonial uma lacuna sobre quais são as possibilidades metodológicas mais coerentes a serem utilizadas em pesquisas decoloniais. Diante disso, buscamos contribuir para a ampliação do processo de escolha de abordagens metodológicas em pesquisas da área dos Estudos Organizacionais (EOR), que sejam, epistemologicamente, alinhadas à abordagem decolonial, ou seja, que respeitem a pluriversalidade de seres, saberes e territórios. Para isso, apontamos a investigação temática como uma possibilidade de metodologia alinhada à abordagem decolonial. Por fim, apresentamos um exemplo de planejamento metodológico para uma pesquisa na perspectiva decolonial, da área dos EOR, que utilizará como metodologia a investigação temática. Concluímos apontando que a investigação temática é uma perspectiva muito alinhada à abordagem decolonial, uma vez que respeita o ser e o território, mas não deve ser adotada sem prévia reflexão crítica, ou seja, como uma fórmula.

**Palavras-chave:** Abordagem decolonial. Investigação temática. Metodologia.

## *Alienación entre la metodología de investigación temática y la perspectiva decolonial: una propuesta para el campo de los Estudios Organizacionales*

### Resumen

Las denuncias promovidas por el enfoque decolonial sobre las prácticas coloniales que se mantuvieron y se mantienen activas, incluso después del fin oficial del colonialismo, así como las críticas que este enfoque hace a la universalidad del pensamiento, contribuyen al avance del conocimiento. Por otro lado, hay un vacío en el enfoque decolonial sobre cuáles son las posibilidades metodológicas más coherentes para utilizar en la investigación decolonial. Por eso, buscamos contribuir a la expansión del proceso de elección de enfoques metodológicos en la investigación, en el área de Estudios Organizacionales, que estén epistemológicamente alineados al enfoque decolonial, es decir, que respeten la pluriversalidad de los seres, conocimientos y territorios. Apuntamos la investigación temática como una posibilidad de metodología alineada al enfoque decolonial. Finalmente, presentamos un ejemplo de planificación metodológica para una investigación bajo la perspectiva decolonial, en el área de Estudios Organizacionales, que utilizará la investigación temática como metodología. Concluimos señalando que la investigación temática tiene una perspectiva muy alineada al enfoque decolonial, ya que respeta el ser y el territorio, pero que no se debe adoptar sin una reflexión crítica previa, es decir, como una fórmula.

**Palabras clave:** Perspectiva decolonial. Investigación temática. Metodología.

<sup>1</sup> We are thankful to Professor Michel Thiollent for presenting us with the book “Methodology, Knowledge Theory and Action Research: Selected and presented texts”, by João Bosco Guedes Pinto, which we used as a basis for discussions on Thematic Analysis.

## INTRODUCTION

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Decoloniality is a research perspective characterized by the critique of the power that colonial thought exercises, in a complex way, in the constitution of being and knowledge (Mignolo, 2010). To exemplify this idea, we reflect on the creation of Brazilian higher education institutions in Administration, between the 1940s and 1950s. In that period, there were cooperation agreements between Brazil and the United States (US); although they were bilateral agreements, US knowledge was valued, and Brazil was subordinated to it (Barros & Carrieri, 2013). Such contracts no longer exist, but the idea of superiority of knowledge produced in the so-called “first world” still prevails.

In Latin America, for example, the predominant content in Organizational Studies is still foreign (Wanderley, 2015), and Brazilian undergraduate courses in Administration are influenced by these models, which underestimate the local reality (Barros & Carrieri, 2013). We can also mention the references adopted in Brazilian regulations, such as consumer protection laws. Rodrigues and Hemais (2020) found that the advertising sector in Brazil follows Eurocentric references, which are distant from the national reality, thus reducing consumer protection against potential business abuse.

Thus, the decolonial perspective reports and reflects on colonial practices that remain active, even after the official end of the colonial period (Ballestrin, 2013), and is a stance against the permanence of coloniality in various dimensions of human life. This perspective contributes to the advancement of knowledge, since it breaks the tradition of determining reference authors and questions the universality of thought (Mignolo, 2003). Reproducing hegemonic practices is a characteristic of the colonialism against which this approach struggles.

However, the free character proposed by the decolonial perspective shows a shortage of references on methodological procedures, some of which are more coherent than others for use in studies based on this perspective.

The only hegemony defended by decolonialism is the development of the “transmodern pluriverse” (Dussel, 2016), which deconstructs the notion of hierarchy and competition among cultures, imposed by Eurocentric modernity and postmodernity. According to this author, over the years, modernity and postmodernity have used the so-called peripheral cultures and diversity (often placed in the exotic and mystical field, as occurs with indigenous cultures in Latin America) as a colonization strategy for silencing differences. Decoloniality is a reaction to the violence suffered by these cultures, and it only accepts the existence of transcultural pluriverses, that is, a symmetrical dialogue among multicultures.

The nature of decolonial perspective leads necessarily to questioning the uncritical use of methodological approaches imported from countries of the so-called Global North. For example, we can reflect on the naturalization of the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative research approaches, as well as analyze the assumptions from which we define what quality research is (R. C. Silva, 1998). Generally, because of positivist indoctrination, especially in the area of social sciences, we idolize research methods and disregard other criteria for evaluating the quality of a study, such as its social relevance.

The decolonial perspective does not point out which methodological references are consistent with it; the Administration area, in turn, being a recent field of research compared to the hard sciences, strongly values this method, as a means of proving its scientific quality. Hence, there is a tension among Administration scholars who wish to adopt the decolonial perspective in their research. This article emerged from this tension, aiming to contribute to expand the process of choosing methodological approaches epistemologically, aligned with decoloniality, based on the discussion on the similarities between decolonial perspective and thematic analysis.

Sauerbronn, Ayres, C. M. Silva, and Lourenço (2021) also showed the need to reflect on the methodological practice of decolonial perspective in the field of Administration. By mapping decolonial research carried out in the area of Accounting, the authors indicate that the use of non-extractive methodologies (built in partnership with the pluralities of individuals and social groups in the selected field) are a possibility of abandoning the belief in the superiority of Eurocentric methodologies present in conventional Administration studies. Abdala and Faria (2017) also propose research committed to co-building knowledge on multiple realities, as part of a decolonial agenda.

In Organizational Studies, a survey carried out by Sauerbronn et al. (2021) did not show the use of alternative methods in critical research, in the area of Accounting. Of the 14 articles found, the historical perspective was the methodological path most frequently adopted, and was also used in decolonial research in the area of Administration, by Rodrigues and Hemais (2020) and Wanderley (2015), who analyzed documentary data. However, not all types of research consist of historical research; hence, it is necessary to reflect on other methodological paths consistent with the decolonial perspective.

Another motivation for this paper was our insecurity about what would be the methodological approach most aligned with the decolonial perspective for a doctoral dissertation research. Apparently, this feeling has also affected other researchers, since, in its 2021 edition, one of the sub-themes of the International Critical Management Studies (ICMS) was “Decolonial Methodologies: on the praxistal (im)possibilities of diversalising ontologies of dissent, fracture, and resistance”. In addition to this event, the UK National Research Methods Center promoted, from October to December 2021, a series of virtual lectures entitled “Decolonial Research Methods: Resisting Coloniality in Academic Knowledge”. The two events highlighted the need to discuss decolonization of research methods, which has led us to reflect on the role of these methods.

Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006) report a frequent questioning about the method used in their research, and this stems from the arrogance of the ‘zero point’, that is, from denying alternative perspectives for modern epistemologies. Especially in the field of Administration, the relevance of methodology may also imply a lack of questioning the training practices in the area; that is, it seems ‘natural’ how the field is structured and how research is commonly carried out (Barros & Carrieri, 2013). According to Abdalla and Faria (2017), when adopting the decolonial perspective, they were questioned and faced an attempt to cancel their initial research project.

Therefore, thinking on methodological procedures consistent with the decolonial perspective in Administration, another strategy is to cross historical barriers in this field. With this paper, we wish to contribute to the co-building of a decolonial agenda, proposed by Abdalla and Faria (2017). Therefore, we discuss thematic analysis as one methodological possibility for research under the decolonial perspective; this choice arose from studying the origins of decoloniality, where we noticed similarities between the formation of decolonial thought and the theoretical and epistemological bases of thematic analysis.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first section, we justify the choice of thematic analysis as a methodology aligned with the decolonial approach. Next, we discuss the perception of decolonial perspective’s authors on knowledge building, and then explain thematic analysis and the connections of this methodology with the decolonial perspective. In the third section, we present a case of methodological planning of a research in the area of Organizational Studies, which intends to use thematic analysis as methodology. In the fourth section, we present the final remarks.

## DEVELOPMENT

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### Origins and affinities between decolonial perspective and thematic analysis

Decolonial perspective began in the late 1990s, mostly from Latin American authors such as Walter Mignolo, Arturo Escobar, Aníbal Quijano and Edgardo Lander, who reported the permanence of colonial relationships in the political and economic spheres (Ballestrin, 2013). Initially, these authors participated in the group of postcolonial and subaltern studies (Ballestrin, 2013). However, over time, they realized that, despite questioning colonization, post-colonial studies did not really break with Eurocentrism, and disregarded the trajectory of domination and resistance in Latin America. For those authors, this region remained hidden in social sciences’ debates. Hence, they organized meetings to discuss the decolonization of Western epistemology and ended up by structuring the modernity/coloniality group and the decolonial perspective.

However, in the 1960s and 1970s, there was already a movement in Latin America, in the area of critical social sciences, which questioned the predominance of Western epistemology in these countries’ research (Duque-Arrazola, 2014). This movement advocated the creation of participatory methodologies, that is, alternative methodologies to classical research. The debates promoted by the group began with critical social sciences and civil society movements, such as the peasant

and labor movements, which objected to the development programs launched in Latin America at the time, by imperialist countries like the United States. Among them, Wanderley and Barros (2020) mention the Alliance for Progress, which promised modernization and financial investment in educational institutions, but was used to cover up and marginalize local knowledge.

There was a reaction against the expansion of imperialist programs in Latin America in that period, with sociological, theoretical-epistemological, and methodological criticisms. Duque-Arrazola (2014, p. 7) mentions: “[...] the sterilizing influence of positivism and empiricism in the social and human sciences was expanded”, suggesting the separation between “[...] dominant science and popular science; and the elitization and monopolization of knowledge production by an academic elite”. In addition, the Latin American Center for Research in Social Sciences (CLAPCS) was created in Rio de Janeiro, in 1957, with the goal of examining the reality of Latin America and questioning the servility of social sciences to reproducing standards of foreign cultures (Bringel & Maldonado, 2016). That same year, the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) was created, and, like CLAPCS, counted with Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda, who actively took part in peasant movements in Brazil (Bringel & Maldonado, 2016). Fals Borda was also important for the social sciences’ movement that fought for the commitment and insertion of researchers in popular movements, and in the development of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology (Duque-Arrazola, 2014).

In 1998, CLACSO held one of the meetings to establish the modernity/coloniality group, which brought together authors such as “Edgardo Lander, Arturo Escobar, Walter Dignolo, Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, and Fernando Coronil” (Ballestrin, 2013, p. 97). The critical social sciences’ movement in Latin America, which defended building participatory methodologies in the 1960s, also had a strong role in the constitution of the modernity/coloniality group in the late 1990s, through CLACSO. Therefore, we notice the connection between participatory research and decolonial perspective, the first being a possibility of a methodological path coherent with the second. Participatory research emerged “[...] from a dissatisfaction with traditional methodologies of social research, all based on idealist or empiricist conceptions of social reality and structured on the basis of formal logic” (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 95). The author of the previous quote, João Bosco Guedes Pinto, better known as Bosco Pinto, was very relevant for the creation and practice of participatory action research, adopted mainly in rural Brazil and other Latin American countries (Thiollent, 2014).

Therefore, we justify our choice due to the characteristics of the participatory action approach (predecessor of the decolonial perspective), and by its proposal of not being a formula for producing mechanical results. Before addressing the commonalities between thematic analysis and decolonial perspective, we discuss, in the following section, the consequences of colonial thinking for knowledge building.

## The decolonial perspective and knowledge building

The methodological difficulties for carrying out research using the decolonial perspective are a consequence of how knowledge building is hegemonically accepted. Dulci and Malheiros (2021) included in their article a topic on the problems they faced during the research, by exposing the uncertainties regarding its methodological course. The authors reported the signs they carry from the “coloniality of knowledge”, and the rational methodological logic they have learned over the years. They still fear the rejection of their paper in academic assessments, since they discuss topics related to feelings, such as hope and love. The decolonial perspective emerged from questioning Latin America’s position in knowledge building in the social sciences, and also from the consequences of modernity/coloniality on life in society. In turn, it shows researchers’ anguish when faced, in the academic environment, with life devaluation, the decrease in the sense of community, and the oblivion of the reasons that created the methods (Mignolo, 2003): the “coloniality of knowledge” still limits us.

The decolonial perspective, through the “other paradigm”, of critical, analytical, and utopian thinking, is a possibility of fighting the scenario of suffering caused by the modernity project. The “other paradigm”, which makes up this perspective, was not intended to name new authors or authors of reference or establish a common origin. In the context of the modernity/coloniality world system<sup>2</sup>, the “other paradigm” consists of a combination of emerging critical thoughts, “[...] to which imperial/colonial expansion denied the possibility of reasoning and thinking about the future” (Mignolo, 2003, p. 20). Hence, methodological possibilities for decolonial research do not imply bringing novelties or universal references but contributing to the joint construction of a decolonial research agenda (Abdalla & Faria, 2017). There is a possibility of strengthening this perspective beyond the decolonial research group itself, thus contributing to reduce fear, obstacles, and empty questions, such as those mentioned by Abdalla and Faria (2017), Dulci and Malheiros (2021), and Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006).

The modernity/coloniality group, faced with the effects of coloniality on knowledge building, still reports the rhetoric that naturalizes modern logic, as if it were a universal and global project, and the practice of knowledge appropriation an “imperial instrument of colonization” (Mignolo, 2010, p. 11). For example, in the area of Administration and Accounting studies, we see the naturalization of modern logic in the practice of submitting local realities to Eurocentric theories and methods, in the name of superiority and scientific neutrality (Sauerbronn et al., 2021). It is through this perverse and violent logic of modernity, which makes thoughts invisible and reduces plurality to exoticism, that decolonial perspective highlights the need to think of ways to decolonize knowledge and subjectivities (Mignolo, 2010). Being alert to perceive alternative knowledge, which hegemony and the “current order of things” can make invisible (Escobar, 2005), leads us to discover how it can turn into research practice.

A possible way to start searching alternatives to the inequalities caused by modern world is to question global social sciences, which are instruments of naturalization and legitimation of the social order (Lander, 2005). Another action is to investigate the dimensions that make up modern knowledge; here, we can mention the multiple separations created by the western world, such as that between religious and historical dimensions, which serve as a basis for building global/universal knowledge. In addition, how modern knowledge articulates with the organization of power, through the idea that the liberal way of life and capitalist relations are “natural forms of social life” (Lander, 2005). This process of reflection is essential, because if we do not question the colonial Eurocentric thinking, it prevails and prevents understanding the reality. Therefore, critical thinking and understanding the elements that constitute modern knowledge are essential for building new thoughts, such as the decolonial perspective. This view is committed to reporting colonial relations hidden in the modernity speech, which strengthen inequalities and violence against life (Escobar, 2005; Lander, 2005; Mignolo, 2003, 2010).

Among the reflections developed by decolonial perspective, we can address the reasons for the dominant thought and social order and recognize the place/territory as a critical element for knowledge building, since this approach highlights that subaltern and local differences are relevant and cannot be erased by universal knowledge (Escobar, 2005). Adopting this perspective leads to a reflective process similar to a self-analysis, as it requires constant reflection on our own views and attitudes regarding the subjects, knowledge, and territories that participate in the research. Dulci and Malheiros (2021) mention that, during their research, they felt marked by the “coloniality of knowledge”, a perception that we also share.

## The methodological proposal of thematic analysis and its connections with the decolonial approach

Thematic analysis is a participatory research methodology created by Paulo Freire and developed in some Latin American institutions, like the Inter-American Center for Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (CIRA), by authors such as João Bosco Guedes Pinto (2014). Bosco Pinto was a Brazilian rural sociologist who contributed to rural development programs, in Brazil and other Latin American countries, as well as to the development of the participatory methodology. In 2014, he published the book “Methodology, Theory of Knowledge, and Action Research”, organized by Professors Duque-Arrazola and Michel Thiollent. It is a collection of his texts, regarding the theoretical-methodological topic related to his actions as a sociologist,

<sup>2</sup> According to Dussel (2005), the idea of modernity is a construction, aimed at acknowledging Europe as the center of the world, that is, the beginning and the end of the development process. To support Eurocentrism, coloniality is used as a control mechanism for power, knowledge, and being (Mignolo, 2010).



activist, and educator (Duque-Arrazola, 2014). Given the transforming action that characterized Bosco Pinto's professional life, the following excerpt shows his attitude towards research and knowledge:

The adoption of a working method (whatever it may be) is also the adoption of a thought and a conception of the world; the more criticized, the more it acquires identity as a praxis and, therefore, a transformation. This contrasts with the cold vision, the bureaucratic and formal way, thus requiring a theoretical commitment and a practical attitude, mainly dialogic (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 128).

Bosco Pinto (2014) understood that research requires a working attitude committed to theory, practice, and dialogue. This conscious behavior regarding the realities that the research addresses is also mentioned in texts that discuss the decolonial perspective, such as Pinto and Mignolo's (2015), who claim that research demands a commitment to change. Decoloniality results in "[...] subjective, epistemic, economic, and political detachment or disengagement efforts, in view of the project of western domination" (Pinto & Mignolo, 2015, p. 384). Thus, if Bosco Pinto (2014) points to the commitment to social transformation, which characterizes thematic analysis, Pinto and Mignolo (2015) define decoloniality as an effort, an action and a stance against imperialism.

Another interesting definition of thematic analysis is that this methodology is a dynamic and relational process, resulting from historical development. Therefore, it cannot be captured in a single moment (Bosco Pinto, Angel, & Reyes, 2014). For this methodology, action and thought make up the process of knowledge; it is through "man's interaction with the universe" that thinking is set in motion and knowledge is built; "[...] thematic analysis deals with the thought of the community, through the expression of thought in language" (Bosco Pinto et al., 2014, p. 104). It also investigates the community's cultural creation, and understands that social reality is changing, historically and relationally; therefore, it is an open process, in development, and the subjects, currently, are the "[...] product of a past that projects itself into the future" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 106). Hence, thematic analysis is a methodology that values the subjects, and is interested in the community's cultural creation.

In general, thematic analysis carries out the study of language, in order to "[...] at first, [...] capture the community's thought about its objective reality, and its perception of this reality" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 97). This is because thematic analysis considers that "subject" and "object of knowledge" are "two aspects of the same reality in dialectical unity and contradiction" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 99). The attitude of valuing the place, history, and local knowledge makes thematic analysis a methodology of resistance to reproducing hegemonic knowledge, as in the decolonial perspective. The reproduction of the hegemonic knowledge is discussed as the radicalization of knowledge universalization (Abdalla & Faria, 2017), since this radical practice of considering a type of knowledge as universal, as is often the case with Euro-American knowledge, causes poverty and geo-epistemic inequality.

One way to overcome this radicalization, poverty, and inequality can be co-building decolonial knowledge with researchers and a diverse community (Abdalla & Faria, 2017). Who owns knowledge building? The lack of people's participation in the analysis of research data, for example, gives the researcher ownership of the definitions and analyses of the phenomenon. Therefore, by fostering their participation in the knowledge building process, thematic analysis has much to contribute, since it encourages diversity and makes collective building possible, facing the monopoly of knowledge production by an academic elite. Likewise, decolonial perspective questions knowledge domain, fighting its subordination and control.

Similar to the decolonial perspective, thematic analysis rejects the possibility of becoming a formula. Using "[...] method as a formula or set of techniques" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 96) can lead to a mechanical result, since reality is dynamic and changes, not fitting a mold. Therefore, it is essential to respect "[...] organizations' own and original forms" that arise "in different communities" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 128). Therefore, besides trying to report the silences and pressures suffered by those who use alternative research methodologies, thematic analysis does not accept universal research models, in the same way that decolonial perspective suggests. "The exposed *design* is in no way a straitjacket, where reality is imprisoned; on the contrary, it is an aid for systematizing and ordering its multiple aspects, which must be seized as a whole" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 129).

Hence, understanding that the development of thematic analysis should not be static, nor blindly guided by a model, we present an example of a methodological proposal based on thematic analysis, with a strong fear of falling into contradiction. However, when choosing the methodology for our thesis project, Bosco Pinto's explanations (2014), regarding the stages of thematic analysis's development – proposed as an aid, not as a prison – provided a more comprehensive understanding. Therefore, expecting to contribute to reduce the insecurities of colleagues who are going through the difficult stage of defining a research methodology under the decolonial perspective, we prepared this example of methodological planning, based on thematic analysis, in the area of Organizational Studies.

We emphasize that this is not a formula to follow, but an example designed for a particular location and a specific type of organization and social group: there are other possibilities of decolonial practices, as well as other methodological paths. We mention decolonial cartography, which discusses the non-neutrality of maps, and proposes the elaboration of affective and collective maps (S. L. S. Neves, L. V. R. F. Neves, Santos, & Figueiredo, 2019; Ribeiro, 2020). We also quote the *Buen-Vivir* methodologies that, based on interculturalism, are concerned with “relational goods”, with feelings such as love and companionship (Dulci & Malheiros, 2021). We also remember decolonial practices that suggest the reconstruction of terms used in the research process, since the term ‘research’ itself is based on coloniality (Ocaña & López, 2019). These choices, as well as the thematic analysis, have in common the understanding that the researcher is only an intermediary in the research, who needs to evaluate himself at all times, so as not to resume colonial practices: decolonial research is built collectively, in a subject–subject relationship, without hierarchy.

## **A METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL OF THEMATIC ANALYSIS FOR A DCOLONIAL RESEARCH IN ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES**

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Although Ocaña and López (2019) criticize the use of terms such as ‘research’, ‘methodology’, and ‘stage’ in decolonial practice, as they understand that proposing decolonial methodologies is a neocolonialism, we still do not hold a position, in the area of Administration research, that allows us to do so. In fact, if adopting decolonial perspective causes us insecurities and obstacles regarding academic assessments (Abdalla & Faria, 2017; Dulci & Malheiros, 2021), not following the textual structure recommended by academic journals and conferences would possibly lead to academic isolationism.

Therefore, as we consider the relationship and dialogue with other important elements for knowledge building, it is necessary to avoid isolation within our field of study, since this attitude would show fundamentalist and essentialist traits (Grosfoguel, 2008). We are aware of the importance of questioning, throughout the research, what underlies our concept of knowledge, and if what is behind our methodological choices consists of colonial indoctrination. Moreover, we also understand the need to move between geographic, epistemic, and political boundaries formed by modernity, to build another knowledge from our reality (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). The thematic analysis methodology can be seen as an early example of knowledge built from this transit across borders.

Designed in the mid-1960s, in the context of agrarian reform in Latin American countries, thematic analysis was an expansion of Paulo Freire’s “psychosocial method”, conceived in the early 1960s, from his concern about adult literacy (Bosco Pinto, 2014). Participatory action research, however, did not originate in Latin America; it emerged in the 1940s, from applications of Kurt Lewin’s social psychology in the US, Great Britain and Scandinavia, and was rebuilt and adapted to the post-war context (Thiollent & Colette, 2013). However, in Latin America, PAR had a strong political role, and was used in education for popular awareness-raising (Gajardo, 1986). From the development of Freire’s method, PAR on this continent began to recognize and consider people’s own knowledge and culture as a starting point for teaching and research (Gajardo, 2021). Despite preceding the discussion held by Mignolo and Tlostanova (2006), this methodology contributed

to build another knowledge, without the need for academic isolation. Starting from the definition of border thinking<sup>3</sup> (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006), we present the possible stages of the thematic analysis methodology as a research proposal under a decolonial perspective.

Since the epistemology of thematic analysis emerged, in a context of creating and rebuilding agrarian reform projects in Latin America, it could only conceive reality as dynamic, relational, and a result of historical processes (Bosco Pinto, 2014). Therefore, coherent with this approach, once researchers choose the community that will participate, the first action should be a survey of its geographical, cultural, and historical characteristics, as well as the community's way of life (Bosco Pinto et al., 2014). Then, the collected information is organized, and researchers begin approaching participants; next, they divide participants in groups, to express their feelings and ideas. In these groups, researchers apply techniques such as participant observation and open interviews, from which they can understand and describe the local sociocultural reality and the historical process that formed it, through the community's perception.

The relevance of historical processes and places are points of reflection in the decolonial perspective, since globalization, by disseminating the idea that a place is not relevant, interferes with this notion and makes invisible the different regional and local ways to configure the world and nature<sup>4</sup> (Escobar, 2005). These provocations help us think on how much the lack of awareness about the role of place and local knowledge can change, and even blind, our perception of a group or a phenomenon, as well as make our learning process about "another paradigm" unfeasible (Mignolo, 2003). The initial stage of thematic analysis consists of collecting and producing data, with the purpose of learning about the context and history that make up that reality, as well as the way research subjects understand it.

Next, we carry out thematization. In this second stage of thematic analysis, the community presents the themes, inside the groups, and researchers organize and codify them. To do this, the researcher can choose data organization techniques that he considers appropriate. The purpose of thematization is to identify the most relevant terms for a given community, those that were mentioned most emphatically or repeatedly during the debates and interviews. This step can also include the theoretical reduction phase, where data is compared to theoretical concepts, together with the identification of gaps between theory and participants' perceptions (Bosco Pinto, 2014). This process is very close to the assumptions of "sociological reduction" proposed by Guerreiro Ramos (1996), which is a method, either theoretical or empirical, to "[...] discover the referential assumptions, of a historical nature, of the objects and facts of social reality" (Guerreiro Ramos, 1996, p. 79). Therefore, like sociological reduction, thematic and theoretical reduction are awareness-raising practices that seek to value local contexts.

After completing the thematic and theoretical reduction phases, we suggest beginning the third stage of the research, named by Bosco Pinto (2014) problematization, consisting of a reflective dialogue with the participants on the coded themes. In a research on film clubs, which are groups of people who present films and hold reflective debates afterwards, problematization can occur, for example, after a short film screening session, with the presence of the film clubs that participate in the study. This moment includes the thematic decoding stage, which originates "a continuous educational process" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 131). The moment of problematization is when the community becomes a "[...] factor of social transformation, through its critical action on the reality where it lives" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 128). This reflection, once again, comes close to the discussions made by Guerreiro Ramos, who argues that critical awareness "[...] arises when a human being or a social group reflects on such determinants and behaves according to them as a subject" (Guerreiro Ramos, 1996, p. 48). Thematic analysis also adopts the notion of subject, where both the researcher and the participants' group are subjects linked by the relationship and dialogue with the objective reality of the research (Bosco Pinto, 2014).

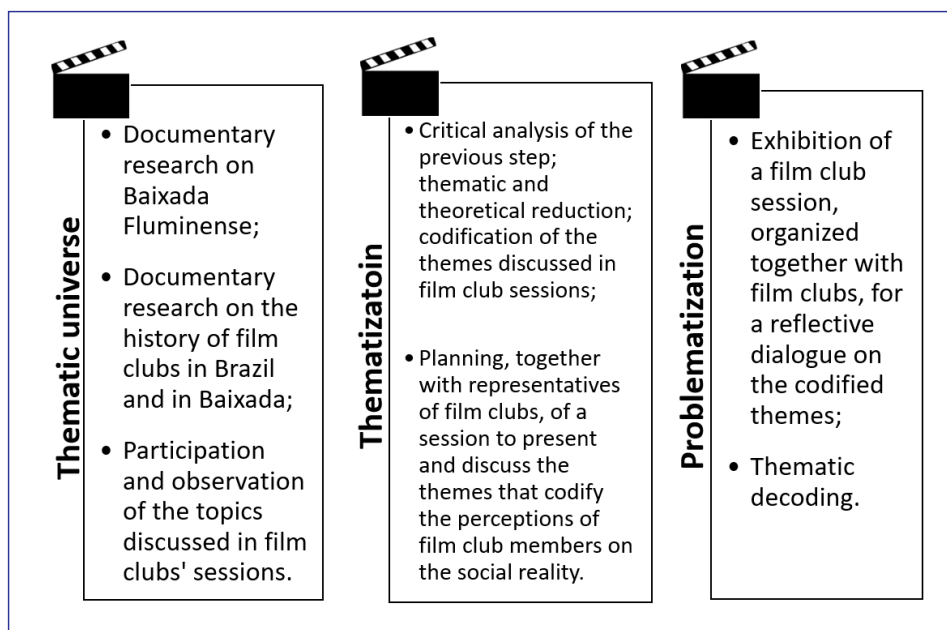
<sup>3</sup> From the perspective of border thinking, it is important to emphasize local thinking, not subordinated to imperialism, without ignoring the theories and practices produced in external contexts (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006). As a result, border thinking contributes to the coexistence of many worlds and knowledge (Faria, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> To reflect on the different forms of relationships with nature, we suggest watching the documentary "Fio da meada", directed by Silvio Tandler (Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm7OjaE6vDc>). We also suggest the debate on the documentary, promoted by Fiocruz, with the participation of its director and researchers, social scientist Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Chief Munduruku Juarez Saw (Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VCGu-C7agro>).



Next, we detail the methodological proposal developed for an ongoing research on film clubs located in Baixada Fluminense, a peripheral region of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The research on film clubs is part of the area of Organizational Studies, based on the decolonial perspective, and developed according to the article “Towards a Substantive Theory of Human Associated Life” (Guerreiro Ramos, 1981). The main objective of the research is to investigate how participants of film clubs in Baixada Fluminense perceive the insertion of these organizations in their respective territories. A characteristic that we observed in these cine-clubs is the authorial production and discussions on short and feature films, which value the local territory<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the dialog feature and land valuation seems to bring the film clubs of Baixada Fluminense close to decolonial perspective and thematic analysis, as they provide reflections and a vision of the place itself. With a methodology based on Bosco Pinto (2014), the production and analysis of data for this research comprise documentary research, unstructured interviews with film club participants, literature review, and discussion in groups of participants. Figure 1 shows the investigation, thematization, and problematization phases.

**Figure 1**  
**Methodological plan showing the research phases on Baixada Fluminense film clubs**



Source: Adapted from Bosco Pinto (2014).

Initially, we carried out a documentary research on the region where the selected organizations are located, in order to know the territory where research participants live. Still in this phase of the thematic universe, we did a survey on the history of film clubs in Baixada Fluminense and in Brazil. By participating in the sessions held by the film clubs, we could record the exhibited themes and the subsequent debates; then, they were organized/coded so that, together with research participants, the topics most cited or emphasized in the sessions could be discussed. After this phase, we did the problematization of the issues addressed in the session, based on interviews and critical reflection. The theory underlying the research should be revisited and revised, at all stages.

<sup>5</sup> Guerreiro Ramos (1981) developed the substantive theory of human associated life. He realized that, in a scenario where the market has become the center of society, with the power to disfigure human life and impose behaviors, there are multiple organizations, formed by individuals aware of the negative effects of market centrality, but who are usually invisible to modern academic circles, thus legitimizing it. Hence, the author argues that a new science of organizations is necessary for social transformation: free from the parochialism imposed by the dominant theory of organization and valuing substantive reason. To learn about the audiovisual production of Baixada Fluminense film clubs, we suggest a preview of the short movie “Amazônia do Sudeste”, from the film club Xuxu ComXis (Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msOyVkJxHRA>). We also suggest the short movies produced by the cine-club Mate com Anгу for the “Programa Convida”, of Instituto Moreira Salles (Retrieved from <https://ims.com.br/convida/mate-com-angu/>).

Throughout the process, we assumed the decolonial exercise of self-criticism regarding colonial thinking, which, for a historical reason (Barros & Carrieri, 2013), still underlies the way we deal with research and how we understand knowledge building. Therefore, the research was participatory, considering different types of knowledge, and validated the history, the territory, and the way research subjects understand reality. This included a process of self-reflection in the search for decolonizing our knowledge building. We understand that the course of thematic analysis, with its dialogic character, can also contribute to the decoloniality of researchers' being and knowledge, in addition to changing the colonial barriers that still limit the area of Administration and Organizational Studies.

## FINAL REMARKS

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This article sought to assist researchers who chose to carry out research from a decolonial perspective, but still are insecure about the potential methodological paths, in the Administration field. Although decolonial perspective suggests the need to find alternative research methods, different from those produced for the Eurocentric and US contexts, it does not point to specific methodologies. The great appreciation of research methods is a characteristic of recent knowledge areas, which seek recognition as a science (R. C Silva, 1998). However, not all areas prioritize this discussion as much as Administration. As a result, researchers who adopt the decolonial perspective are trapped between the idolatry of research methods, which requires a detailed explanation of the methodological procedures of the research, and the lack of methodological references consistent with the decolonial perspective, which brings uncertainties.

Among possible methodological paths consistent with the decolonial perspective, such as decolonial cartography (S. L. S. Neves et al., 2019) and *Buen-Vivir* (Dulci & Malheiros, 2021), we chose to focus on the participatory action research (PAR) methodology, as a proposal for research in the area of Organizational Studies. Although PAR was originally conceived for the American and European realities, in Latin America it emerged in a scenario of demands from the critical movement of the social sciences, against imperialism and the predominance of Western epistemologies. As a result, participatory research in Latin America is different for valuing each person's own knowledge and culture, and for seeking to raise awareness and change a scenario of lower classes' subordination. In the 1960s, this perspective rose from "[...] a dissatisfaction with traditional methodologies of social investigation" (Bosco Pinto, 2014, p. 95), and, in the late 1990s, the Latin American movement of critical social sciences contributed to hold one of the formative meetings of the modernity/coloniality group.

Due to its character of struggling against imperialism and the search for a regional thought of its own, thematic analysis approaches the foundations of the decolonial perspective: both consist of a political act of social commitment, which questions the monopolization of knowledge production by an academic elite. In addition, decoloniality criticizes the process of territory devaluation, caused by modernity, which has the same principle of thematic analysis, of reinforcing the need to know the cultural creation of the community participating in the research, which means valuing the place, its historical construction, and the different kinds of local knowledge. Both also reject the possibility of being a formula, or a straitjacket, as they value critical reflective thinking and the participatory building of transformative local knowledge.

The transformation proposal brought by thematic analysis caught our attention as we viewed this methodology from the decolonial perspective. Thematic analysis only mentions the transformation of the community and the subjects that take part in the research, and not the possibility of transforming the researcher during the process of listening, observing, and exchanging knowledge. Hence, we believe that decolonial perspective can complement the methodology of thematic analysis and other forms of participatory research, by raising the researcher's awareness of the coloniality present in knowledge building. In this path of decolonial thematic analysis, we see the possibility of changing the scenario of academic arrogance and the distance between scientific and popular knowledge.

Therefore, we perceive decolonial perspective and the methodology of thematic analysis as complementary research practices: the former broadens the criticism of colonialism and motivates constant reflection on colonial practice and thought, while the latter, developed in opposition to the imperialist practice in the Latin American social sciences, provides the possibility of a new methodological path. Hence, from a decolonial perspective, together with the phases proposed by thematic analysis (investigation of the thematic universe, thematization, and problematization), we suggest that the researcher includes the critical-reflective decolonial attitude on the coloniality of being, knowledge, and territory.

Finally, we acknowledge the relevance of the decolonial perspective for rescuing the critique of coloniality but wish that the discussions held by authors of the Latin movement on participatory methodologies be revisited and gain higher visibility. In a following research, we intend to compare the theoretical bases of the modernity/coloniality group to the authors of the critical social sciences movement in Latin America in the 1960s, as we understand that the members of this movement, with their methodologies, are the pioneers of this thought that questions knowledge building as a minority's possession. We also hope to disseminate, in a future study, the results of the thematic analysis carried out with the film clubs of Baixada Fluminense, within a decolonial perspective, which we present here as an example of a methodological approach.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The present research received support from the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES), through the Support Program for Private Postgraduate Institutions. Process number: 88882.366167/2019-01, in the name of Vanessa Faria Silva.

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