

Searching for a Southern perspective on climate coverage: a contribution from critical discourse studies

Em busca da perspectiva do Sul na cobertura do clima: uma contribuição dos estudos críticos do discurso

En busca de una perspectiva del Sur sobre la cobertura climática: una contribución desde los estudios críticos del discurso

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Abstract

This article aims to point out the contributions of critical discourse studies for analyzing products from the journalistic field from the study of climate change coverage. We take as an object an alternative media, Conexão Planeta, which maintains an engaged and contesting stance in the face of environmental injustices. The observation of the dichotomy of North /South, articulated to the climate crisis, is privileged here to study how the representations of its causes and solutions are amplified or silenced, even by vehicles that are not dominant and, theoretically, would have greater editorial freedom to discuss the status quo. Regarding the results, we point out that the perspective of the South manifests itself in a limited way, with the predominance of alternatives to the crisis arising from hegemonic thinking, as well as the actors that usually appear in the mainstream press.

Keywords: Journalism. Climate change, Critical discourse studies. Decolonial studies.

Introduction

Journalism tends to construct news about climate change predominantly from the perspective of experts in the scientific field when reports on the subject are released, such as those of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), or political actors, usually when the annual meetings of the Conferences of the Parties (COP) take place. In these two situations, sources and contributions from the Global North are often dominant. Brazilian researches reveal that moments of climate coverage tend to be sporadic and focused on the approach of the North (Loose, 2016), where the research institutions considered central are located and from where are made global decisions that have repercussions in different territories, often without considering the specificities of each location.

However, in Brazil¹ and other countries in Latin America and Africa, for example, environmental vulnerabilities make climate consequences more serious (UNDP, 2007; IPCC, 2014). This is due to greater dependence on natural resources and other social and economic needs. Research shows that the countries most affected by the climate crisis are those that contribute little to carbon emissions. According to Germanwatch's Global Climate Risk Index², eight of the ten countries most affected by extreme weather events between 1998 and 2017 were low- and lower-middle-income developing countries.

In this context of unequal impacts and responses, in which some countries are much more resilient than ours, international climate agreements reflect an enormous dispute of interests, which tends to favor developed countries or those from the Global North, as observed by Santos (2007a; 2007b).

A study by the Brazilian Panel on Climate Change (PBMC, 2016, p. 12) reinforces that development problems, typical of countries in the Global South, put pressure on climate effects:

1 Despite the problems already felt, Brazil ranks fifth among the largest climate polluters, behind only China, the USA, Russia, and India, mainly due to changes in land use (SEEG, 2021).

2 Available at: <<https://www.germanwatch.org/en>>. Accessed on 30.01.2022.

The suppression of ecosystems, triggered by rampant urban growth, is one of the main factors reducing the resilience of cities, leaving them more vulnerable to current and future problems, which could be accentuated by climate change, such as the increase in heat islands, air pollution, and flooding.

Climate risks can affect any city and person, but how each one reacts and can cope with a situation caused by an extreme event depends significantly on the socioeconomic conditions. Therefore, the phenomenon itself might even be considered “democratic”, but its impacts can never be seen in the same way: vulnerabilities and reaction conditions tend to direct the most harmful effects of climate change to the most impoverished population, underlining social inequality.

In this paper, we mobilize critical discourse studies and decolonial studies to identify how climate news in an alternative media outlet, *Conexão Planeta*³, corroborates or does not support the questioning of the system that has brought us to this climate crisis. In the first section, we address the climate issue from the North/South dichotomy. Next, we present critical discourse studies as a theoretical-methodological framework that denounces exploitation and social inequalities. In the third section, we bring some excerpts taken from the study undertaken by Loose (2021) and conclude with our considerations about the analysis.

Crossings of the Global North and South in the Climate Crisis

When we talk about coloniality and the need to decolonize, we can refer to many things that, although diverse, are connected to the centuries-old Western project of domination, including economic policy, power structures, and issues of race and class. Grosfoguel (2018) reminds us that the world system brings in its political-civilizational package a financial system of capitalist accumulation, but also patriarchy, racist exploitation, aesthetic standards, Christianity, and the relationship between human beings and the Earth. This is how genocide, femicide, epistemicide, and ecocide are linked in coloniality.

Historical capitalism and its colonial cradle cannot be separated from the factors constituting it as a civilizing system. Never was it just about territorial and economic expansion but about the planetary expansion of one civilization by eliminating others. Many of the ways of knowing-being are still unrecognized by the dominant thinking of the Global North, both in the lands called America and in those called Africa. Eurocentric thinking has become naturalized as if it were the only one.

The climate crisis is global, although its impacts are strongly felt at the local scale. The various productive sectors in different countries and regions contribute to the problem differently. The amount of greenhouse gases released by livestock activity is not the same as in the service sector; for example, a person’s carbon footprint in Europe is, on average, higher than that of a person in Africa. Even if we consider the same country, the differences are enormous depending on lifestyle: the homes of affluent Americans generate about 25% more greenhouse gases than homes in impoverished neighborhoods in the same country.⁴

The immense regional inequalities, and the no less social inequalities in the same territory, operate cleavages so deep that it is not possible to think of the same contemporaneity for all populations: life experiences radically depend on the positionalities we occupy (territory, language, gender, class, work, etc.) (George, 2018). For this author, contemporary realities can be very different, and the differences are not only geographical, but also climatic, political, economic, and environmental. These differences occur in the oppositions between fast and slow, mobile and stationary, connected and disconnected, and they mark accesses and blockages to contemporary experiences, leading to different states of freedom, possibilities, and capacities of resistance to the contemporary.

Porto-Gonçalves (2006) points out that while a few groups benefit from the resources extracted from the territories of the South, the tailings of the extractions impact the environment of the most marginalized local populations in places where people seem worthless. The quality of life enjoyed in the North (and desired by the elites of the South) is anchored in a series of injustices and much destruction made invisible by the global elites so that their project is not interrupted. The current capitalist-colonialist system feeds on environmental exploitation and, therefore, sustains the idea that we are not part of nature, but that nature is available to serve the desires of humanity.

³ The site embraces its pro-environmental activism and states that its mission is to “inspire towards action”, something typical of counter-hegemonic or alternative media outlets that take a stand, as opposed to hegemonic or traditional media outlets that claim neutrality, objectivity and/or impartiality. To find out more: <<https://conexaoplaneta.com.br/sobre/>>.

⁴ Available at: <https://www.ecodebate.com.br/2020/07/23/casas-de-americanos-ricos-tem-pegadas-de-carbono-25-mais-altas-que-residencias-de-baixa-renda/>>. Accessed on 27 jun. 2022.

The coloniality in our development model does not occur only in the relations between the countries of central capitalism and the peripheral ones (Green, 2013). Colonial eco-destructive practices are applicable within each territory, which causes the most vulnerable subjects to be exploited as productive resources and the natural resources of the place itself to be continuously used in favor of a minority. Environmental colonialism, in this way, functions as an ideological system of exploitation, operated in a planned and legitimized manner and with the consent of national elites (Atilos-Osória, 2013). According to Green (2013), this expansion of endless exploratory actions will lead to the self-destruction of the species and the (already present) planetary crisis. After all, continuous growth, called progress or development, comes up against the material limits of our planet. Concealing these relations in discourses that represent the climate crisis in ways that obfuscate their direct relationship with the capitalist productive system and the ways of life of the elites is an efficient way of maintaining this state of affairs.

In addition to the abysmal differences in how each country, social group, or person contributes to the problem, the possible solutions to reduce the damage and prevent the crisis from escalating are also not unique. However, climate governance generally tends to follow the decisions made based on scientific studies of the Global North, which do not always correctly consider the intricacies and environmental specificities of the South (Karlsson, 2005). With less investment, research, and political discussions, the South often accepts solutions designed and executed according to the North's thinking. The lack of scientific knowledge about the realities of the Global South leaves it in an unfavorable position in the face of the dominant logic, subject to options based on the experiences of the countries of the North and following its interests in maintaining historical privileges.

The hegemonic perspective of Northern thought, formalized in “top-down” governance flows, works with actions and strategies due to its context and point of view, perceiving the world as a globalized society. Generally, the resolution of the issue is confined and restricted to political actors, actors in the productive sector, especially the business community, and specialists with technical-scientific knowledge based on Eurocentric knowledge. However, there are very different discrepancies and guarantees between countries in the Global South and Global North.

What [the countries of the North] do not say is that their internal (national) rules protect them from certain embarrassments that vague global norms do not foresee, leaving countries devoid of such artifices on unequal trading terms. In this way, the most vulnerable regions to climate (and environmental) risks are those with the least legal support. The absence of “bottom-up” measures, even due to a lack of knowledge and devices that bring the population together around collective interests, also compromises the confrontation of projects designed from other realities and interests (Loose, 2016, p. 399).

We depart, then, from this critique of colonial thinking, which ignores and devalues knowledge and actions derived from the experiences of the peoples of the South, to observe how a vehicle of journalism specialized in the environment, admittedly positioned in favor of the environmental cause, dedicates little efforts to make visible other discourses on climate change, more consistent with the view of the South. We believe that the subject should be presented from multiple perspectives and that “top-down” and “bottom-up” actions should be concurrent.

In this text, we analyze data from journalism committed to sustainability that could act for transformation within the limits of its discursive practice. According to Oliveira (2017, p. 211), “emancipatory journalism is not the one that will change the world, but contributes to ‘thinking about the world and its transformation’”⁵. Following this reasoning, we opted here for critical studies of discourse due to its positional character. After all, such a perspective “seeks to promote the awareness of individuals regarding the relations between discourse and social structures, representing, therefore, a form of struggle for changes in society” (Melo, 2012, p. 77).

We also rely on Santos (2007a; 2007b), in his reflections on alternativity and resistance to the hegemonic, to register that the intention of the research of which this article is an excerpt was not to point out another path that will become hegemonic, replacing an (almost) unique model of vision. We recognize the role of the scientific field – and, in this specific case, the IPCC studies – but we understand there are other possibilities to address the issue and perhaps even bring this problem closer to the population. We assume, then, a place of speech in which the myths of scientific and journalistic impartiality are explicitly denied.

⁵ All the references written originally in Portuguese or other language rather than English have been freely translated.

Critical Discourse Studies

Critical discourse studies (CDS) include, among other approaches, the strand of discourse studies that began with the release, in 1979, of the work by Fowler, Hodge, Kress, and Trew entitled *Language and control*, which understands the work of discourse as a social practice capable of transforming society – a reaction to the dominant paradigms in the 1960s and 1970s (Van Dijk, 2005). Such research gained more space in the 1990s when CDS was consolidated as a field.

Teun van Dijk was responsible for the dissemination of critical discourse studies in Spanish-speaking Latin America and largely contributed to the creation of the Latin American Association of Discourse Studies (ALED), founded in 1995 in Venezuela (Vieira; Macedo, 2018). Ten years later, in 2005, in Chile, a multidisciplinary group of researchers created the Latin American Network for Critical Discourse Analysis on Poverty (REDLAD), emphasizing the discourse-poverty binomial.

In the Brazilian case, the institution of critical discourse studies was greatly influenced by British studies. Two Brazilian researchers with academic backgrounds based in England were pioneers in these studies in Brazil. First, Izabel Magalhães, who published the first article in Portuguese on critical discourse analysis (Magalhães, 1986), and, from the same generation, Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard, who has dedicated herself to gender and multimodality studies.

The critique that crosses CDS is also reflected in the coloniality present in the countryside, which tends to apply knowledge created in the North to the reality of the South. Resende (2019) recalls that, in Brazil, discourse studies are mainly divided between the so-called ‘French’ and ‘English’ strands, a continuity of the subordination of analysts from Brazil about their peers from the North, resulting from the Eurocentric epistemological legacy. From the dominant languages in the scientific field and the use of foreign references to legitimize research, spaces of academic recognition and prestige are imposed. Reaction to the coloniality of discourse studies in Latin America is not a matter of rejecting the knowledge of the North but of valuing those that tend to be made invisible or belittled in favor of a single thought.

We reiterate Resende’s (2019, p. 35) assertion that “decolonizing critical discourse studies from Latin American perspectives implies recognizing that our colonial history and the violence that constituted us cannot be ignored”. We add that the separation between humanity and the environment and the conception of nature as something to be exploited underpinned a series of colonial ways of being, existing, and living. Reflecting on how the appropriation of nature took place and understanding this process as a domain of the colonial matrix (Mignolo, 2017) is fundamental to observing the ideologies that remain present in journalistic discourses, including those with an environmental niche, as is the case of our focus in this article.

Structures intersect in social practices and events, including the texts that are part of them. Particular social groups have greater power when they can control the actions of other groups (Van Dijk, 2001) and when they can define the relative bases for social action, for example, by controlling institutions of governance apparatus. As discourse is a constructive principle (which establishes the forms we can give to reality), a normative one (which constitutes the rules for the functioning of practices), and interpretive (which lays the basis for their evaluation), it has inescapable relevance in the definition of what is represented as possible, desirable, accessible or utopian (Resende, 2017).

This also refers to what Van Dijk (2009, p. 6) discusses as an intersubjective dimension derived from the experiences of socialization that we share as social groups and that lead to “various types of shared knowledge and other beliefs”. This sharing of meanings stabilizes ways of understanding social issues, including relations with the Earth, which can be investigated through the discursive route, through discursive mappings in different socio-political fields, such as the law, the media, social and political movements, texts of the world of life, etc.

The analysis of texts as empirical material for the approach to social problems is also justified because, in CDS, it is understood that the production of narratives (including journalistic ones) is the reconstruction of fragmentary events as distinct and separate events, including specific events and excluding others, as well as organizing these events constructed in particular relationships.

Therefore, producing texts in the different domains of discursive production is an interpretative and constructive process. Texts can also have “an ‘explanatory intention’ related to ‘focusing’: to make sense of events by placing them in a relationship that incorporates a particular point of view” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 84-85). In CDS, therefore, texts can be oriented towards the regulation and control of events and the way people react to events.

Van Dijk (2005) states that one of the dominant patterns observed through CDS in media discourses is the relations between the Global North and the Global South. The researcher points out how the facts are represented based on this dichotomy:

If events [such as climate disasters] are put in their context and explanations are given, they tend to blame the “retrograde” policies and behavior of Third World nations, organizations, and politicians in the first place. At the same time, these explanations put the direct and indirect effects or legacies of Western colonialism, corporate practices, military intervention, international trade, and politics in the background. On the other hand, Western aid and other contributions are emphasized and presented as beneficial and rarely as problematic. As in the case of ethnic issues, the overall portrait of the Third World is organized through combined strategies of positive self-representation and negative presentation of the other (Van Dijk, 2005, p. 92-93).

Given this overview of CDS, we present some more specific notes about their presence in journalism studies. We identified that this reference is still poorly articulated in the Brazilian journalistic field, especially in studies with environmental interfaces. According to Carvalho (2017), media discourses are decisive for amplifying and legitimizing some views and marginalizing or concealing others. For the author, analyzing the discourses on the climate crisis and their silences is relevant to understanding the disputes that involve our future. After all, several economic, political, and cultural tensions involve the choices and non-choices of the press’s schedules. Given this, Carvalho highlights the need to advance critical studies of the climate change discourse:

Values, worldviews, ideologies, and multiple forms of power are deeply interconnected with meaning-making practices on climate change. Thus, discourse scholars are responsible for identifying, analyzing, and exposing how debates are often managed and distorted and how this connects to issues of power and justice (CARVALHO, 2017, p. 487).

In discursive studies focused on climate change, it can be noted that the press reproduces and amplifies government voices, making visible a technocratic discourse (Moraes, 2015). This tends to privilege managerial perspectives instead of presenting more radical discourses capable of transforming the system that produces the climate emergency (Carvalho, 2017) rather than discussing neoliberalism and free-market capitalism. Max-Neef (2012), when dealing with the coercion of language, asserts that humanity is in a trap caused by the dominance of economic language in all spheres, ultimately influencing perceptions and behaviors. Moreover, one should not lose sight of the fact that media outlets, such as companies in conglomerates, serve the specific interests of elites, who are not interested in profound changes in the orders of things that have benefited them economically and symbolically – on the contrary, they invest in ways to maintain the status quo.

The corpus of analysis for this article

Among the alternative media oriented to the environmental agenda, we chose “Conexão Planeta” because it presents a specific space for climate coverage, the target of our interest, and informs that it is driven by activism and the desire for transformation. In the tab of the website where the initiative is presented, we identify a posture engaged with environmental care and with the need to mobilize more people to act in favor of what is expressed as “a happier future”.

In addition, the vehicle can be found in the “Map of independent journalism” by “Agência Pública”⁶, which brings together media that 1) primarily produce journalistic content; 2) were born in the network; 3) are characterized as collective projects (they are more than blogs, usually maintained individually); and 4) have no connection with large media groups, politicians, organizations or companies. Such characteristics are essential to distinguish independent journalism from other media content (which does not respect journalism’s ethical and deontological norms) nor the traditional/hegemonic practice, which can also offer niche products, such as “Um Só Planeta”⁷, by Grupo Globo.

In 2019 and 2020, “Conexão Planeta” published 236 news items about climate change, a number higher than other outlets observed in the same period, such as “Envolverde”⁸ and Colabora⁹, which are also dedicated to environmental issues and are on the map of “Agência Pública”. This recurrence in coverage, added to its activist stance, coincides with what Environmental Journalism proposes (Bueno, 2007; Frome, 2008; Loose; Girardi, 2017) and justifies our choice for the undertaken analysis.

6 The methodology of this mapping can be accessed at: <<https://apublica.org/mapa-do-jornalismo/metodologia/>>.

7 Available at: <<https://umsoplaneta.globo.com/>>. Accessed on 10 oct. 21.

8 Available at: <<https://envolverde.com.br/>>. Accessed on 10 oct. 21.

9 Available at: <<https://projecolabora.com.br/>>. Accessed on 10 oct. 21.

Analysis

Our analysis aims to highlight the North/South relationships presented in the climate coverage of “Conexão Planeta” between January 2019 and December 2020. In these two years of coverage, the climate strikes, led by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, especially in September 2019; then COP-25, held in December of the same year in Madrid, followed by a drop in attention to the topic, caused by the circumstances of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Conexão Planeta”, in general, emphasizes the activist look supported by science. Environmental activists are often heard and given space to claim their agendas. Also, frequent activist sources are “celebrities” (actors and singers, for example) or people already widely recognized by the public (such as Greta Thunberg).

The news linked to Greta Thunberg is based on her texts and speeches, and there is no concern with the information balance (giving even space to contrary versions) when they mention sources that criticize the activist or her way of exposing the climate cause. The outlet takes the activist’s side, always highlighting the merits she has already achieved. She also recurrently challenges readers, with gradations of enthusiasm, to action.

In an article published on September 30, 2019, about a Time Magazine list of 15 women who lead the climate fight, Thunberg is mentioned – and being the best known appears in the title of the article, dedicated to bringing brief biographies of each of the nominees. We highlight here the gender focus linked to Time’s list, also valued by the outlet in the opening of the text (emphasis added):

Global warming is affecting everyone, but it is undoubtedly the poorest and most vulnerable who will suffer the most, especially women and girls, who bear the brunt of environmental, economic, and social shocks. “Often, they are the last to eat or be rescued; face greater health and safety risks as water and sanitation systems become compromised and assume an increase in domestic and care work as resources dwindle,” the UN experts warn. Perhaps because they better understand same-sex suffering around the world, many women are raising their voices and working hard to combat climate change.

The gender perspective in the approach to environmental activism makes us reflect on social justice and the inequalities that permeate the climate emergency. In the news built from Thunberg’s demonstrations (her public speeches, interviews, or posts on social networks), the rhetoric of the inequality between peoples of the North and South is present, even if it is not the main topic. Thus, the intersectional aspect of climate and environmental vulnerability is considered in terms of gender – women are identified as more vulnerable – but the racial, national, and territorial aspects are hidden.

In December 2019, “Conexão Planeta” covered the political events that usually occur during the COP period. Many of the 22 news items published in this period focused on international events, such as fires in Australia (which received more attention than those on Brazilian soil). Although many articles criticize the slowness of government actions, the predominant focus in this period was on climate action, and the name Greta Thunberg was mobilized in five titles this month (she was present at COP-25).

The news associated with activism, highlighted in the representativeness achieved by Thunberg, are permeated by a rhetoric of inspiration and hope:

It inspired millions of young people to participate in the largest climate march in history on September 20. It has drawn the ire of fools, especially on the far right. And she became Time magazine’s Person of the Year for having captured like no activist before her the hypocrisy of the discourse of hope and the gulf between the declared good intentions of governments and their actual acts against greenhouse gases – a day after being called a “brat” by Jair Bolsonaro. (Dec 29, 2019, emphasis added).

The inspiration for the Families for Climate movement comes from Greta Thunberg, of course. Parents for Future was also born out of the movement sparked by 16-year-old Swedish activist Fridays for Future, created from her solitary demonstrations every Friday in front of the Swedish parliament. (Dec 20, 2019, emphasis added).

The young woman pointed out that although governments are meeting at COP-25 to discuss solutions to face the climate crisis and reduce carbon emissions, the hope for something to be done is in the streets, in the power of society, and in people who need to make it clear that they demand change. (Dec 9, 2019, emphasis added).

The sense of inspiration is linked to the movements provoked by Thunberg (inspiration to youth and families). Still, the sense of hope is more ambiguous, as it is sometimes negatively linked to ‘good intentions’ apart from government action (as in the December 29 text). Sometimes, it shifts to the action of civil society (as of December 9).

The positive emphasis on activism also appears in the news item of March 20, 2020, which announces the death, due to COVID-19, of Brazilian chemical engineer Sérgio Campos Trindade. “Conexão Planeta” calls him an “expert and advocate of renewable energy as a way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions”, suggesting science as a positioned activity, which can also be activist.

In the coverage of COP-25, we identified that “Conexão Planeta” used other media outlets and NGO websites that published on this subject, with space for civil society perspectives and closer to a biocentric ideology and criticism of coloniality. In the article of December 9, 2019, provoked by Thunberg’s speeches and of which we have already seen an excerpt, the outlet highlights the activist’s quotes in favor of the voices that are usually silenced: “We need to lend our voices to the populations of the South (Hemisphere) and to indigenous peoples, who are the ones who are suffering the most from the climate crisis. The change we need will not come from those in power but from those who demand it. We want change” (emphasis added). Here, the intersectional aspects of climate vulnerability are more complex than in the previous sections, including territory and ethnicity. However, class and race are not mentioned within the same territory. It should not go unnoticed that the excerpt attributed to Greta reifies a posture of frequent vocalization: people in positions of power (in terms of race and territory, in this specific case) often believe that they can or need to “give voice” to other less empowered actors when, in fact, what we often lack is to “listen”.

In the post-event period of the climate marches and COP-25, coverage was initiated on overcoming the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in line with climate action. The economic responses turned to the countries of the North, and there was an erasure about how to face the recession in the South, especially the debate about the social inequalities experienced during the pandemic, which tend to be significant with the deepening of the climate emergency.

It is essential to point out that a role of humanity, whether generalized or individualized, is repeatedly found in the corpus of “Conexão Planeta”, which calls on readers to participate in campaigns to face the challenge of combating climate change. Thus, the newspaper adopts an imperative mode, performing a function of demand (invitation, challenge) addressed to readers (addressed as “you” in a tone of proximity), which also encourages through a deontic modality of possibility.

With the help of people like you, it is possible to reverse the damage caused by the planet’s changing climate. Join our petition and ask for the protection of the oceans. Thank you for believing that the world can be a better place for everyone and being part of the team that protects the planet. (Feb 18, 2020).

That is, anyone, like you and me, can participate. On its website, the Green Initiative maintains an emissions calculator for anyone who wants to determine its footprint. Go find out what is yours! (Oct 16, 2019, emphasis added).

The challenge is set! Starting today, Monday (June 17), we invite you to spend a week without consuming meat and animal products. (Jun 17, 2019, emphasis added).

When dealing with the post-COVID-19 economic recovery, even a vehicle considered alternative takes on the rhetoric based on green growth with reformist measures, such as expanding renewable energies and manufacturing electric vehicles. As Moreno (2016) states, the green economy was forged in the post-crisis context of 2008, unifying sectors and governments based on the Global Green New Deal, made by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), but which encompassed other UN agencies. In this sense, the green discourse is a central part of one of the many changes of capitalism to maintain itself over time, overcoming its multiple crises without ever really transforming itself (Fairclough, 2006).

At Rio+20, in 2012, the idea gained scope and legitimacy, being put forward as a “new paradigm for international cooperation” (Moreno, 2016, p. 263). However, these proposals result from efforts since the late 1970s, used as a unifying narrative of finance capital to keep the wheel of capitalism turning. With a global recession forced by the shutdown of activities due to the pandemic, the discourse of green growth is boosted once again. It has its effect of inevitability and unquestionability increased.

Who would be against economic growth that would benefit the fight against climate change? Few thoughts bring together so many actors and institutions because a mixture of interests sell themselves as compatible and are endorsed at different scales by different segments. Therefore, the pandemic is articulated with a great recession

and, at the same time, with an opportunity for governments and companies to review the direction of the economic system, with the green economy being presented as the only alternative (other possibilities are silenced). But the focus is on “ensuring the survival of these companies”, and governments are called upon to assist in this path with subsidies:

The Spanish government wants an economy with 100% renewable energy and an end to new fossil fuel projects.

“At a time when we have to face the recovery process against COVID-19, the energy transition will become a determining driving force to generate economic activity and employment in the short term”, said Teresa Ribera, Minister of Ecological Transition. (May 28, 2020, emphasis added).

Merkel stressed that economic stimulus programs should prioritize new technologies and renewable energy. She advocates for governments to attract private sector money through international financial markets to finance “the costly shift toward a more climate-friendly economy”. (Jun 5, 2020, emphasis added).

The discursive reinforcement attributed to the crisis and the urgency with which we have to face it raises the idea that it is essential to implement the available solutions – and only those in the North are presented as viable by government officials, economists, and other experts, social actors generally aligned with Eurocentric thinking and who usually obtain legitimacy (even through the press), exercising top-down power, which tends to favor groups/sectors that are already historically benefited.

In these two years of analysis, “Conexão Planeta” has brought the perspective of the Global North countless times, not exploring national events, such as the fires in the Pantanal, and talking very little about deforestation and fires in the Amazon.

Local productions corroborate this distancing: indigenous peoples are mentioned, but there is no space for the speeches of their leaders, as in the news “Artists, indigenous people and young people from the Guri Project record a video clip warning about the climate and the future of the planet: ‘Where are we going?’” (Dec 20, 2019) and “Sonia Guajajara wears a mask created by artist Néle Azevedo for the 5-year campaign of the ‘Paris Agreement’” (Dec 14, 2020). In “Greta Thunberg meets with Indigenous Sioux Americans for the climate, participates in protests and receives a name of Lakota origin” (Sep 14, 2019) and “Indigenous wisdom against climate change: leaders create a network of access to finance”, there are quotes from indigenous speeches, and during COP-25, Joênia Wapichana had space in the text “Ricardo Salles lies and reveals lack of compassion and dialogue at the UN climate conference, in Madrid” (Dec 10, 2019), but this news are exceptions. The visibility given to indigenous peoples is still low compared to other consulted sources.

Final considerations

In the journalistic texts analyzed, the presence of the South, which supposedly opens space for peripheral actors despised by the conformation of Western thought, occurs limitedly. The ideology of the ruling elites is maintained even in this alternative media, expressing what Góes (2017) calls journalistic coloniality. The reproduction of the discourse of the green economy as the only possible way out and the silencing of the sectors that emit the most greenhouse gases, as is the case of agriculture in Brazil, reinforce meanings already known in the traditional press.

Tiny spaces for actions and actors aligned with biocentric ideology reduce diversity and foster monoculture. Santos (2007a; 2007b) sums up the potential of the hegemonic press to maintain the abyssal line that classifies our world today: “Media communication suggests that it makes you aware of everything relevant in the world and, beyond that, there is nothing else”. On the other hand, he understands that the counter-hegemonic (or alternative) press can deconstruct this structure, opening “space for the emergence of the sociology of emergencies, that is, to make visible the social, political, and philosophical creativity that exists in the world on the other side of the line” (Loose, 2018, p. 144). However, to fulfill its role as a counter-power and break with the thinking of the North, the journalistic field needs to be reformatted and encompass other principles, criteria, and actors.

The assumptions of Environmental Journalism, thus, emerge in half, in pieces, since plurality and diversity seem to be restricted even in the most alternative forms of journalism. The South’s territories, practices, and way of existence, repeatedly made invisible by the hegemonic media, continue to need help entering the journalistic field, even in the alternative scope. The thinking of the South, based on repairing the damage caused by capitalism driven by coloniality, erupts at times but fails to make a counterpoint to the neoliberal discourse. By amplifying the global aspect of the climate crisis, rather than diluting responsibilities and silencing the inequalities that derive from it,

the vehicle feeds the “top-down” idea, that solutions also need to come from those holders of technical-scientific knowledge founded in the North.

Although it includes a position about the emancipation of the peoples of the South, as well as the endorsement of indigenous discourse (or climate defenders) by activists and journalists, the question remains as to whether this call gains attention for its relevance or just because it already comes from another being (white and educated), framed in what can be accepted within the scope of modernity. Added to this is the fact that indigenous peoples are mentioned in the news, but few are the times when they are sources of consultation for producing texts in the vehicle during the studied period.

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