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Emerging Trends in Tourism Studies from a Latin American Lens

Tendencias emergentes en los estudios turísticos en clave latinoamericana

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Abstract

The present essay is a critical study that reflects on the main intellectual debates concerning neoliberalism and academic inequality in Latin American tourism studies. To this end, three stages are proposed that combine a dual analytical dimension: one epistemological and the other sociological. First, key aspects for considering and addressing the idea of neoliberalism in the social sciences of the Global South are explored. The second axis includes an analysis of dependency within tourism studies. Finally, the transformations in how cultural and tourism studies are thought and conducted from a Latin American perspective are examined. Through this approach, the aim is to contribute to the reflexivity of the field by problematizing not only the cognitive challenges that exist but also the power dynamics at play. This study serves as a non-exhaustive yet necessary invitation to construct new horizons of truth.

Keywords : academic dependency, neoliberalism, tourism studies, cultural studies, Latin America.

Resumen

El presente ensayo constituye un estudio crítico que reflexiona sobre los principales debates intelectuales relativos al neoliberalismo y la desigualdad académica en los estudios turísticos latinoamericanos. Para ello, se proponen tres etapas que combinan una doble dimensión analítica: una epistemológica y otra sociológica. En primer lugar, se exploran aspectos claves para pensar y abordar la idea de neoliberalismo en las ciencias sociales del sur. Por su parte, el segundo eje incluye el análisis de la dependencia al interior de los estudios turísticos. Finalmente, se exploran

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las transformaciones en las maneras de pensar y estudiar los estudios culturales y turísticos desde América Latina. Con todo lo anterior, se pretende contribuir a la reflexividad del campo, problematizando no solo los desafíos cognoscitivos que existen, sino las reglas que se ponen en juego bajo la dimensión del poder. Este estudio es una invitación no exhaustiva aunque necesaria para construir nuevos horizontes de verdad.

1. Introduction

There are various concerns within the international scientific community regarding the construction of knowledge in tourism. Authors such as Jafari and Ritchie (1981), Tribe (1997), Jafari (2001), and Ren, Pritchard, and Morgan (2010) are just some of the international scholars who have examined the historical performance. In the Latin American context, contributions can be identified from scholars such as Hiernaux (2002), Castillo Nechar (2005), Niding, Andueza, Fariás, Alonso, and Zamudio (2010; 2011), Panosso Netto (2007), Panosso Netto and Nechar (2016), Campodónico and Chalar (2011), Korstanje (2013; 2014; 2015), and Comparato (2019a; 2019b; 2022). Despite this trend, there are not many works that explicitly address the possible relationships between globalization and neoliberalism and, consequently, the impacts on scientific productions within the field.

Within this framework, far from being an exhaustive or exclusive study, this document is a critical essay that reflects on and problematizes the main intellectual debates related to the academic dependency of Latin American tourism studies in relation to the Global North. More specifically, it is a piece of basic research grounded in a literature review, framed within the development of research lines conducted or previously conducted at the master's and doctoral levels.

For this reflection, a series of conceptual categories are employed, whose utility allows for the interweaving of regional issues with global processes. The starting point is the recognition of a series of transformations in the contemporary globalization process. However, acknowledging such changes is insufficient without understanding the imprints of neoliberalism and, consequently, new forms of dependency and colonialism. These latter categories are what enable reflection on Latin American tourism studies within an international framework of positions that favor/inhibit, include/exclude, and make visible/invisible research practices, theoretical-methodological decisions, as well as forms of knowledge validation and consecration.

In terms of research problem, and given the potential thematic complexity and diversity, three scales are referenced under a structure that moves from the general to the specific. First, some of the main contemporary issues in the social sciences from Latin American contexts are synthesized. Some of the questions that arise include: What are the main visibility challenges for the social sciences in the region? What power relations manifest in scientific circulation? Is it possible to discuss neoliberalism and academic capitalism? These questions hold strategic importance to avoid considering tourism in isolation or as emerging *ex nihilo*; instead, they aim to link it to broader contexts.

Secondly, the aim is to analyze the consequences of the aforementioned processes in terms of dependency within the field of tourism. This includes both an intellectual dimension and an institutional one. On the intellectual side, the need to consider historiographical frameworks when analyzing tourism studies is discussed. On the

institutional side, the rules of scientific circulation are introduced within a *publish or perish* context. In this regard, the main challenges faced by authors and journals in achieving greater visibility for knowledge are examined.

Finally, as a conclusion to the proposed roadmap, one of the possible disciplinary relationships was selected. This section aims to analyze the debates and tensions that occur in the field of cultural studies and tourism in the Latin American region. The choice of this research line is justified by its aim to make the consequences associated with neoliberalism visible; however, this does not imply that it is the only one. This decision follows an expository rationale while encouraging further expansion in future research using other categorizations and fields. On this occasion, it was recognized that the cultural approach to tourism studies in Latin America uniquely highlights the importance of culture as an object of consumption, particularly when viewed through external and non-local frameworks that often anchor difference as something fixed, exotic, and authentic. This allows for problematizing the idea of colonialism and academic dependency from an epistemological, as well as conceptual and prescriptive, perspective. In a disruptive manner, Latin American authors are presented who offer the initial guidelines for considering the relationship between cultural studies and tourism from a decolonial standpoint, contributing to the development of a contextually relevant theoretical corpus for the region.

In all cases, mainstream databases (SCOPUS and Web of Science) were used, as well as indexing services or search engines where works of Latin American origin have greater representation, such as the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), the Regional Online Information System for Scientific Journals of Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain, and Portugal (Latindex), the Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America and the Caribbean, Spain, and Portugal (Redalyc), and Google Scholar. In terms of language, works in English, Portuguese, and Spanish were included. As a methodological practice, only titles and keywords whose results matched the terms "neoliberalism," "colonialism," or "dependency" within the scope of "Latin America" or "Latinoamérica" were considered. This work was conducted in September 2023, and subsequently, the corpus most directly related to the research topic was selected. While this decision was considered fruitful for overcoming some language barriers and expanding beyond mainstream databases, it is acknowledged that the work does not exhaust the topic. On the contrary, it aims to continue preceding lines of research and serve as starting points for new investigative questions.

Regarding the importance of this work, it is primarily worth highlighting its propedeutic significance. This is because it is a proposal whose main contribution lies in fostering reflection within a metascientific framework, problematizing not only the cognitive challenges that exist but also the rules at play in tourism research within the Latin American context and the role it occupies in the power dynamics of international scientific systems. In this way, it establishes a research topic that is read not only from an epistemological perspective but also from the sociology of science. From a practical standpoint, it is considered that the construction of theoretical categories and the choice of epistemological positions have an impact on research praxis as well as on the intervention carried out in the social reality of tourism. Consequently, it is imperative to reflect on and problematize the field of analysis, seeking new ways to promote the production of knowledge that is both original and contextualized to regional issues.

2. Key Insights for Thinking About Dependency and Academic Capitalism in Latin America

Just as neoliberalism is a polysemic concept, so too are its applications. In this sense, while recurring approaches can be recognized—such as the study of the commodification of leisure time, accumulation by dispossession, or the impacts of global tourist capitalism (Sequera, 2020)—it is also possible to identify research gaps, such as the consequences of neoliberalism on research practices. This latter area gives rise to concerns such as the study of the principles that govern the construction of research agendas, funding allocations, language barriers, mechanisms for knowledge validation, or the Article Processing Charges (APC) required to publish or access mainstream publishers.

In *The Handbook of Neoliberalism* (Springer et al., 2016), neoliberalism is acknowledged as one of the most powerful concepts in social sciences over the past few decades. However, as Boron (2006) points out, it has long been confined to the idea of being a purely economic program. On the contrary, neoliberalism also functions as a theoretical framework within the social, cultural, and everyday lives of Latin American societies (Furlan Da Costa and Goulart, 2018). Thus, “neoliberalism has established the barbarity of economic reductionism that afflicts us today. Its impact is confirmed in the exaltation of the influence of economic elements on the entirety of social life” (Boron, 2006, p. 47).

Thus, the premises of neoliberalism focus on (1) the imposition of the free market, (2) trade and financial liberalization, and (3) the conception that the state is displaced from economic and social domains, where social rights are transformed into mere commodities. In other words, it prioritizes individualism, where decision-making is based on the idea of maximizing benefits and minimizing costs to satisfy selfish interests. The intellectual rationale behind this is the *Homo Economicus* (Delgado, 2006).

These “peculiarities of neoliberalism” (Katz, 2015, p.1) in Latin America were framed within an imagined natural insertion into the global market and a reproduction of underdevelopment based on primary exportation. Specifically, since the late 1980s, the Washington Consensus was adopted by many countries in Latin America and the Global South. This consisted of ten policy instruments presented as suitable for ensuring the sustainability and growth of debtor countries, especially based on the alleged inefficiency of the state (Castañeda Rodríguez and Díaz-Bautista, 2017; Harvey, 2005; Furlan Da Costa and Goulart, 2018; Rodríguez, 2023).

In the words of Pradilla Cobos (2009), incorporating an intellectual dimension into the study of neoliberalism implies recognizing that there is often a complacent attitude in adopting fashionable or “correct” concepts without acknowledging their social impact on Latin American realities. This occurs, among other reasons, due to a failure to identify the various spheres of domination within global capitalism. The academic and higher education sectors in the region have not been exempt from this logic, which, according to Saura and Bolívar (2019), has been adopted as an ontology inherent to being a researcher in these contemporary times.

Hence, it is crucial to highlight the impacts of neoliberalism on the Latin American region and how these have specifically influenced knowledge production and concrete practices within the tourism phenomenon. Some notable characteristics of this new

regime include (1) the privatization and commodification of higher education¹; (2) the definition of science as that which serves the market and its profit-driven interests, known as "useful science" or applied research, as opposed to basic research; (3) the displacement of critical thinking in favor of productivity (academic productivism) among researchers, which translates into a focus on the quantity of publications over their quality and contribution to scientific knowledge; (4) the research agendas of many Latin American countries being managed and funded by international organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (BID) and the World Bank (WB). This leads to the production of knowledge that is disconnected from the territorial realities of the region (Delgado, 2006; Boron, 2006). Authors Furlan Da Costa and Goulart (2018) align with the Academic Capitalism Theory (ACT) proposed by Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), noting that "there is a transition in the new economy from a public good regime of knowledge/learning to an academic capitalist regime of knowledge/learning" (p. 402).

To consider the intervention of neoliberalism in the academic sphere, it is essential to address the concept of dependency. Within the category of dependency, at least two analytical layers can be identified: an a) epistemological dimension (related to how social reality is explained) and a b) sociological dimension (related to the production and circulation of that knowledge). In the first sense (among other possible ones), Quijano's (1999) concept of the 'coloniality of power' can be revisited. According to the author, the coloniality of power entails the persistence of racism as an organizing principle of multiple hierarchies, including the hierarchy and predominance of Western, Eurocentric, and Euro-American knowledge. This organizing principle originates in colonialism². Although colonialism ("global colonialism") has been eradicated at the level of the colonial administrative structure, coloniality ("global coloniality") persists through situations, cultural patterns, and political structures that operate within the social fabric (Grosfoguel, 2007; Quijano, 1999; Rodríguez, 2023). This refers to the oppression and exploitation of subalternized, racialized, and ethnic groups across various dimensions, such as sexuality, spirituality, economy, and epistemics.

In relation to the above, epistemic coloniality, according to Grosfoguel (2007), refers to the "prevalence of Western knowledge over other types of epistemologies and cosmologies, institutionalized in the global university system" [own translation, p. 217]. Analogous to this idea is the concept of intellectual colonialism coined by Fals Borda (1970), who argues that the uncritical appropriation of knowledge produced in other latitudes, when applied to different territories, results in an analysis detached from the local reality. This is also discussed in terms of the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2009; 2011) and the coloniality of power (Quijano, 1992). The coloniality of knowledge refers to the Eurocentric nature of modern knowledge, which is imposed as universal knowledge. This coloniality is intertwined with the coloniality of power, as it forms the structure and framework within which other dimensions and aspects of social life take place.

This subordination of knowledge from peripheral countries to Western knowledge (European and American) was further deepened by the dependency theory movement starting in the late 1960s. Although it placed strong emphasis on the functioning of the economy, this line of thought sought to foster discussion on the development model of Latin American (peripheral) countries in relation to their dependency on central countries. According to Prebisch (1963), the periphery consists of countries that are structurally dependent on the center, subjected to unequal exchange (deterioration of terms of trade), with the center as the sole beneficiary. In this way, the economic relations of Latin

American countries are shaped by this relationship of domination and subordination, also extending to Westernized schemes and patterns of rationality (Pereira da Silva et al., 2018).

Another perspective on dependency is proposed by Enrique Dussel (2000) from the 1970s onward. He is one of the founders of the philosophy of liberation movement in Latin America, whose starting point is the excluded and the "negated" other (the non-being). From an intellectual standpoint, his aim is to establish a horizon that unveils the mechanisms producing the prevailing order. It is from this reflective standpoint that praxis and the management of action are conceived. Specifically, Dussel invites critical reflection on the discourses of European and Anglo-American philosophy, while emphasizing the role of Latin American philosophy in advancing the project of historical liberation.

Just as certain common denominators can be identified within the idea of dependency, it is also true that new debates and perspectives have emerged to address the asymmetries and inequalities in the field of scientific production. Thus, categories such as 'academic dependency' (Beigel, 2016), 'intellectual dependency,' 'academic capitalism' (Slaughter and Leslie, 2001), 'epistemic dependency' (Pereira da Silva et al., 2018), and 'academic imperialism' (Alatas, 2003) have arisen.

Regarding the latter, Alatas (2003) notes that this type of imperialism is analogous to colonialism in other spheres of society, such as politics and economics. However, academic imperialism tends to exert influence more indirectly than directly, as the logics of knowledge production and legitimation are internalized as part of the academic status quo. Thus, "the West controls the monopoly and influence over the nature and flows of social scientific knowledge..." [own translation, p. 602]. The author also highlights the persistence of Western institutions and ideas in the scientific agendas of dependent countries, in the use of methodological techniques, the definition of problems, and the standards of recognition and excellence.

Beigel (2016) presents two strands within the thought on the coloniality of knowledge and power. (1) The first is a Latin Americanist perspective that argues that Latin American theoretical knowledge is "captive to Eurocentrism and imprisoned by the international division of scientific labor" (2016, p. 7). Consequently, it calls for a restructuring of social sciences, led by new academics and researchers of Indigenous and Afro-descendant backgrounds. This approach aligns with the authors mentioned at the beginning of this section (Alatas, 2003; Fals Borda, 1970; Grosfoguel, 2007; Quijano, 1999; Pereira da Silva et al., 2018). (2) The second strand focuses on dismantling the notion that original knowledge is only produced in central countries and that the peripheral field is subordinated to them. It further argues that measuring scientific knowledge according to the criteria or standards of central countries (such as the U.S. model) perpetuates dependency.

Beigel (2016) belongs to this second strand, defining academic dependency as "an unequal structure of knowledge production and circulation, historically constructed by the traditional 'centers of excellence,' without the participation of peripheral scientific communities" (2016, p. 9). In this way, the researcher offers a critical reflection on the academic dependency of 'peripheral' countries, arguing that the subordination of the Latin American academic sphere is not rooted in the outright importation of European

and American knowledge, but rather in the patterns of circulation of scientific knowledge production.

This debate leads us, therefore, to the second axis: dependency related to the sociology of science and, more specifically, to academic production. In this regard, the aforementioned author, along with others such as Galassi (2013), Floriani (2015), Preciado Coronado (2016), Piovani (2015, 2018), and even CLACSO³ following Galassi's publication (2013), situates the discussion of academic dependency within the framework of the sociology of science. This approach focuses on the analysis of regional and national scientific production (theoretical, methodological, and technical orientations), the writing format (structure and organization of academic works), and the publication process (type of journal, medium, impact). They also emphasize that academic dependency is evident in how scientific research adopts a universal language (English) and writing style (the paper) to align with the mainstream circuit, which benefits the Global Academic System (GAS) (Piovani, 2018).

Although participation in the mainstream provides Latin American researchers a certain degree of recognition and prestige, there are other circuits of scientific publication at transnational, regional, and local scales. This leads to the argument that the academic field of Latin American research establishes its own criteria and indicators for scientific measurement and dissemination. However, many research institutions continue to replicate mainstream evaluation standards. As Beigel explains, "the analysis of the originality of academic production is displaced by the valuation of the 'excellence' of the publication, which is, in turn, measured based on its adherence to the standards established by traditional centers themselves" (2016, p. 13).

Based on the aforementioned, a key point emerges. Just as the publication of scientific journals has been a prominent feature in the institutionalization of sciences and a means of disseminating scientific knowledge, it also serves as a sociotechnical device for scientific consecration (Salatino, 2019). Within this framework, analyzing scientific journals becomes central not only to reflect on scientification as a generalized issue but also as an unequal one, with shifting rules and patterns that reveal central and peripheral areas.

3. Dependency and Inequality in Tourism Studies

Once the Latin American context has been presented, Comparato (2019a, 2019b, 2022) identifies an inequality that also becomes apparent in tourism studies. In the first sense, while acknowledging that Jafari (1979, 1994, 2001) was among the first and most frequently cited works to problematize the scientification of the field, its historiography is overly totalizing and generalist. That is, it presents a narrative that fails to make visible, for example, the multiplicity of actors with diverse interests who contest the ways of explaining the practice of tourism and, particularly, rarely ventures beyond European and North American geographies.

If we refer to how historiography in tourism has been traditionally conducted, Towner (1995) identifies a strong presence not only of Western perspectives but also a historicity centered on wealth and elites. Conversely, the activation of peripheral areas for tourism (*pleasure peripheries*) is generally narrated as a class emulation process (*emulation class*), which typically begins with the dominant classes. In other words, the territorial conquest of tourist spaces starts with aristocratic classes (often linked to

landowners in Latin America) and is later contested by other actors or social sectors. Additionally, in methodological terms, this has led to the neglect of numerous historiographic sources (paintings, photographs, literature, etc.), units of analysis, and alternative geographies.

On the other hand, Tribe (1997), in his renowned work "*The Indiscipline of Tourism*," adds complexity to the approaches to studying tourism by identifying two fields within what we call tourism studies. On one side, there is the *business-related* dimension, encompassing areas like marketing, business management, etc., and on the other, *non-business-related tourism*, which results from the intersection of various social sciences. The key point here is that there are not only diverse intellectual frameworks for understanding tourism but also different actors and interests guiding knowledge production, along with the power relations embedded in it. This theme is revisited in his 2006 work "*The Truth About Tourism*," where he acknowledges that tourism research carries a subtle power to define and objectify. In other words, it has the ability to foreground certain issues while leaving others unexamined; to legitimize certain methods while marginalizing others; and to prioritize some groups while excluding others (Tribe, 2006).

How, then, is this epistemic coloniality linked to the field of tourism studies in Latin America? Authors such as Wijesinghe et al. (2019), Chambers and Buzinde (2015), Grimwood et al. (2019), and Rodríguez (2023) argue that the field of tourism studies is shaped by the colonial matrix of power. In other words, it continues to privilege Western epistemologies and theoretical frameworks for understanding the tourism phenomenon, as well as scientific production that adheres to Anglo-centric standards (Wijesinghe et al., 2019).

Similar to the concept of *global coloniality* proposed by Grosfoguel (2007), Wijesinghe et al. (2019) argue that the globalization process is framed as an extension of colonialism, representing a new form of neocolonialism. In this context, tourism operates on a global level and is mediated by a *status quo* that upholds specific power structures in both tourism practices and the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge:

"Thus such ideology of "top journals", "top authors" and "universal knowledge" (only if published in "top journals") had led tourism scholars around the world to experience what Syed Hussein Alatas refers to as "intellectual imperialism" [Wijesinghe et al., 2019, p. 5]

Here, the idea of the *Knowledge Force Field* proposed by Tribe (2006) can also be highlighted. The author argues that the relationship between the theoretical production of tourism and its concrete practice is shaped by five factors: person, rules, positions, ends, and ideology. These aspects are intertwined with the dimension of power, offering a framework to understand how knowledge is produced and created in the field of tourism, while recognizing the gaps and discrepancies in its construction.

If we turn to the second analytical level (sociology of science), a key question arises: What are the particularities of these inequalities within the field of Latin American tourism? Comparato (2019b; 2022) suggests that the development of tourism studies over the past decades has created new positional structures that involve new orders. In this sense, Comparato (2019b; 2022) identifies historical advancements in Latin America linked to the field's development but also notes two distinct situations. On one hand, there

exists a series of centers, journals, and authors (the majority) rooted in a strategy of local-regional circulation—in other words, local circulations within global contexts. On the other hand, in contrast, there is a minority whose forms of publishing, visibility, and circulation are oriented toward diverse and international audiences. This prompts the reflection that the study and education in tourism have undergone not only a rhizomatic process but also one of increasing asymmetry. That is, a polymorphism that can only be adequately understood through the lens of an unequal structure.

This highlights a dual-structured issue: production and circulation. On one hand, Latin Americans face barriers to accessing *mainstream* specialized spaces. These barriers are primarily linked to language but also include economic and financial constraints. Such barriers may be direct, such as *Article Processing Charges* (APCs), or indirect, through the specialized translations required by many high-impact journals. Additionally, there is a notable lack of Latin American representation in the editing and peer review processes of these journals. On the other hand, a second layer concerns the circulation of produced knowledge. Even in global contexts, most specialized tourism journals in the region face significant challenges in gaining readership and citations beyond their own geographies. Consequently, it is no surprise that many of the most referenced works in the field scarcely cite spanish-speaking authors.

In terms of reflexivity, considering inequality and dependency when analyzing the field of tourism studies requires addressing a problem that is not solely intellectual but also tied to positioning within a structured space of positions. Among the myriad variables that act as determinants, the place from which such exploration or contribution is conducted plays a critical role. Thus, it is argued that there are various determining factors, which operate within a space that is neither homogeneous nor flat. There are, in fact, diverse contextual performances.

4. Tourism and Cultural Studies in Latin America

In relation to the dimensions of dependency and neoliberalism that permeate the field of tourism, it is relevant to delve deeper into their impact on the way cultural tourism studies are approached in Latin America. This discussion begins with the premise that the theoretical categories framing this work are paradigmatically illustrated in the epistemological positions adopted within this field, as well as in the practice of tourism itself.

The economic dimension of neoliberalism is often the most evident within society and in tourism practices. Tourism incorporates the sociocultural references of a society into the market, endowing them with both use/consumption value and exchange value. In the words of Bolaños (2016), “*it is symbolic capital that can be converted into economic capital*” (p. 155). Culture becomes commodified with the aim of generating economic profit, serving the interests of the market and the private sector. In this context, the Latin American space has been extensively valued by tourism, leading to the significance of this activity for the development of economic, urban, and cultural policies, among others (Perichi, 2000; Hiernaux and González, 2014). International organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (BID), external consultants from developing countries, and transnational organizations that invest capital play a key role in defining and implementing guidelines for planning and management.

It is often argued that neoliberal policies function as mechanisms, whether explicit or implicit, that perpetuate contemporary forms of domination and dependency in political, economic, and particularly cultural dimensions. This reflects a coloniality that outlives colonialism as a historical moment, persisting into modernity and continuing to exacerbate segregation and inequality in Latin American societies (Maldonado Torres, 2007).

Through *cultural commodification*, tourism exoticizes otherness and frames cultural difference within coherent and homogeneous symbolic characteristics designed for market consumption (Hernández Hernández, 2012). In this way, global capitalism appeals to “*the supposed ‘national essences’ to inscribe them within the universality of the market*” (Vich, 2006, p. 159) or, in other words, “*manages difference as a mere market resource*” (Vich, 2006, p. 166). Particularly in tourism promotion, cultural expressions are often projected as ‘*authentic*’. The notion of “authenticity” evokes the idea that the cultural expressions of a tourist destination are fixed traits, discrete entities, pristine and immutable (Wright, 1998). A similar phenomenon occurs in the process of heritage activation. Through this process, the cultural heritage of destination societies is valorized and hierarchized as heritage by the state or other institutions, such as UNESCO, through a hegemonic lens. This often renders invisible the narratives and symbolic aspects of subaltern identities (Wright, 1998; Vázquez, 2014; Staszak, 2012).

The culturalist approach holds that each society, rooted in a specific geographic space, corresponds to a set of specific, coherent, and authentic cultural traits (Bayardo, 2000; Fuller, 2015; Vich, 2006; Vich, 2007). This conception becomes enclosed within the cultural dimension, neglecting other aspects (economic, political, historical, among others) that intersect with social processes (Bayardo, 2000; Comparato, 2019). As Grimwood et al. (2019) state, “*there is, for instance, a long history of representations produced in academia contributing to the pathologization of Indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and over-romanticized imaginaries of primitive, anti-modern cultures, on the other*”(p. 5). Moreover, at the institutional level, the colonial relationship of dominator/dominated persists, as researchers from the Western world adopt epistemological perspectives rooted in Western and Eurocentric paradigms. These perspectives imply that the dominated (or non-Western populations, excluded from the order established by the modern Western world) are incapable of producing knowledge, or if they do, it is deemed invalid (Rodríguez, 2023). Bhabha argues that “*the language of theory is just another trick of the culturally privileged Western elite to produce a discourse of the Other that reinforces its own power-knowledge equation*” (Bhabha, 2007, p. 41).

Before delving into cultural and tourism studies in Latin America, it is essential to introduce the debate surrounding two approaches: the postcolonial and decolonial perspectives. The postcolonial perspective proposes a roadmap to decolonize Western thought while seeking the production and validation of alternative knowledge. However, this approach has been criticized by several authors such as Grosfoguel (2007), Wijesinghe *et al.* (2019), and Rivera Cusicanqui (2011), who argue that many intellectuals advocating postcolonialism produce knowledge from Western institutions that continue to reference and adopt theories, terminology, and empirical studies from Western authors. This has been a breaking point for many groups studying cultural aspects. Grosfoguel highlights this when discussing the causes of the fragmentation of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group⁴, stating that “*they [postcolonial researchers] produced studies about the subaltern rather than studies with and from a*

subaltern perspective” [2007, p. 211]. This is also mentioned by Restrepo (2014), who refers to the conception of ‘*Latin American cultural studies*’ as emerging from positions that disregard or ignore other scientific productions conducted within the region.

Restrepo (2014) emphasizes the importance of distinguishing cultural studies from studies of culture in Latin America. He points out that cultural studies rest on four aspects: (1) the concept of culture is understood in relation to power, (2) they constitute an interdisciplinary (and additionally transdisciplinary) field, where multiple perspectives interact with one another, (3) they are configured as a political project, as they aim to transform social realities, and (4) methodological pluralism is adopted to address different contexts. These criteria can serve as a starting point for analyzing the approaches through which cultural studies have been addressed within the field of tourism.

According to Hiernaux (2002), the tourism and heritage valorization of a territory's cultural references is fundamentally based on an external, foreign gaze. This gaze is often constructed through romantic, essentialist, and stereotyped aspects to facilitate consumption (Moscoso, 2021). Although the culturalist approach does not permeate the entire field of tourism, there are studies that adopt it as a perspective. In this way, under this criterion, part of the institutional sphere of tourism, as well as certain Latin American studies focusing on the cautionary or unfavorable platform of tourism (Jafari, 2001), draw on a cultural notion stemming from the so-called central anthropologies, which rely on the conception of social totality (De Sousa Santos, 2009; Restrepo, 2014; Wright, 1998). This notion frames heritage analysis from two approaches: (1) tourism as a threat to the loss of authenticity in cultural values and (2) tourism as a means for valuing and recovering distinctive cultural references of destination societies. However, the cleavage of these analyses sometimes overlooks the power relations involved in the process of heritage and tourism valorization. In other words, identity essentialism entails a coloniality of power relationship, segregating and repressing certain dimensions within the cultural traits of a destination society. Finally, it is worth noting that research proliferating in the Latin American realm of cultural studies in tourism empirically correlates with territories featuring a strong cultural component linked to Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and colonial heritage (Domínguez, 2008; Domínguez, 2020a; Domínguez, 2020b; Herazo Dilson, 2020; Maya-Soto and Castillo-Nechar, 2022; Morales Blanco, 2021; Valle, 2018).

Dependency and neoliberalism become embedded in the field of tourism studies through the conception of culture shaped by hegemonic organizations and institutions (such as UNESCO), which render invisible the narratives and symbolic aspects of subaltern identities (Wright, 1998). In tourism, “*subalterns are invented as mystical and exotic subjects, but never as political subjects*” [Vich, 2007, p. 23]. In this way, a search emerges to break with cultural concepts and the ethnocentric gaze of the West, making way for a detachment rooted in the decolonial perspective. Thus, Latin American thinkers such as Victor Vich (2006, 2007) and Fuller (2015) emerge, advocating for a reflective stance on the relationship between tourism and culture, understanding culture as a dynamic and relational process mediated by power relations on different scales (international, national, regional, local). Furthermore, they oppose the idea of tourism as a banalizing agent of cultural references, since this argument implies the existence of a real and authentic cultural heritage, valued through a series of demarcatory elements.

On one hand, Vich (2006; 2007) argues that much of the cultural expressions of Latin American countries are narrated to the international market as “*supposed national*

essences” [Vich, 2006, p. 159] for their commercialization through tourism, driven by hegemonic interests and power relations. In one of his articles, he problematizes the Peruvian figure of the *brichero*. This subject embodies two discourses: one linked to colonial heritage and the other to the global neoliberal market (tourism). These discourses are intricately articulated, where at times the subject appears to break free from the reins of domination and seems capable of negotiating their own identity framework in relation to capitalism and tourism practices. However, they eventually become ‘subjugated’ again by the logics of the tourism market. The central idea of the author is to analyze the possibility of agency for these subjects, whose symbolic figure is anchored in stereotypes, yet transcends them through negotiation within the global-local relationship (Vich, 2006). In other words, to use the very hegemonic narrative produced by the tourism sector to their advantage: “if, on one hand, hegemonic forces impose a role on us that implies a certain symbolic emptiness, on the other, it is also possible to use what we have to disrupt these logics and produce new types of exchanges” [Vich, 2006, p. 167].

On the other hand, Fuller (2015), like Vich (2006; 2007), argues that cultural identities within tourism have been constructed through a romanticized perspective and that, in today’s global world, cultures are not isolated but in continuous interaction. For the author, it is problematic to “essentialize cultures by assuming that there is a real or authentic version that tourism would harm” [Fuller, 2015, p. 106]. Another important point in her thinking is the idea of tourism as a discursive device that frames and shapes cultural expressions. Tourism acts as a storyteller of historical narratives, presenting them as authentic—an authenticity fabricated for consumption rather than an inherent trait. Finally, Fuller (2015) proposes moving beyond the debate between authentic/inauthentic, true/false, and reality/spectacle, which has become ingrained in the studies of tourism and culture. Instead, she advocates for focusing the analysis on the power dynamics and conflicts hidden behind the processes of tourism and heritage valorization.

Another intellectual, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2011; 2018), although belonging to the fields of sociology and history, offers ideas that can be applied to the discussion of cultural perspectives within the tourism field. The author uses the Aymara concept of *Ch’ixi*⁷ to define the process of construction and configuration of cultural identities. The concept of *Ch’ixi* also aligns with the ideas of Vich (2006, 2007) and Fuller (2015) regarding multiscalar negotiation and the complex process of enunciation. *Ch’ixi* represents the coexistence of polyphonic cultural identities that interact in a complex enunciative process where they complement or antagonize each other but never merge into a single culture (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2011). For Rivera Cusicanqui, this process of enunciating cultural difference cannot be reduced to the discourse of hybridization, which she critiques for combining heterogeneous cultural elements under an unproblematic, harmonious, and conflict-free perspective, shaped by a hegemonic canon that converges differences for its own interests. This idea can be applied to tourism, where cultural promotion narratives often deploy an “ornamental and symbolic multiculturalism (...) a conditioned inclusion” [Rivera Cusicanqui, 2011, p. 58]. Regarding the academic field, Rivera Cusicanqui reflects in a manner consistent with the arguments of Grosfoguel (2007) and Restrepo (2014), asserting that colonialism permeates intellectual thought and university spaces in the Global North. From these spaces emerge what she calls “think tanks”, which infiltrate Latin American research, producing interpretations and analyses that are out of context with the social realities of the region.

Dussel (2005) presents the epistemological, theoretical, and ethical framework of transmodernity, which also serves to problematize the neocolonialism perpetuated in today's world through both epistemological and practical criteria. This project is founded as a critical transcendence of modernity and postmodernity, as it gives recognition and affirmation to the "*cultural moments [of the Latin American sphere] that have been denied or simply disregarded and are situated in the exteriority of Modernity*" [Dussel, 2005, p. 24]. Thus, the critique targets the essentialist vision of a hegemonic Westernized monoculture, which simultaneously creates the "naive" notion of multiculturalism as a mode of recognition through a "symmetrical illusion," accommodating "subaltern cultures" as cultural differences but not as colonial differences. In this way, transmodernity, as a perspective that transcends and goes beyond the categories of modernity/postmodernity, embraces intercultural dialogue (from asymmetrical conditions and cultural borders) as a transversal and transformative praxis of the social sphere. This framework is particularly suitable for rethinking the relationship between culture and tourism from the perspective of the philosophy of liberation, as it provides a series of categories to uncover the symbolic relationships involved in constructing attractiveness and heritage activation within the field of tourism, as well as the power relations embedded in the academic sphere.

In conclusion, neoliberalism manifests as a commodifying logic that permeates the interrelation between tourism and culture. Tourism, as an activity intrinsically tied to consumption, facilitates the incorporation of a territory's sociocultural references into market dynamics. At the same time, the emergence of new epistemological perspectives and theoretical frameworks within cultural studies of tourism in Latin America can be observed. These operate as a decentering of the conceptual *corpus* imported from central and Western countries, though they remain incipient. Engaging with these authors is considered to provide a suitable framework for more reflective analysis within both the academic sphere and tourism praxis itself, as the reproduction of neoliberal, colonialist, and dependency-driven patterns continues to occur in both spaces.

5. Discussions and Conclusions

Thinking about neoliberalism, inequality, and dependency in Latin America requires considering different levels, issues, and scales. Within this framework, the presented essay aimed to reflect on some of these dimensions in three stages, oscillating between aspects related to epistemology and the sociology of science. Despite the methodological limitations and biases initially expressed, at least three main findings can be highlighted:

First, the importance of addressing some of the issues in tourism studies in alignment with broader challenges common to the region's social sciences was recognized. One way academic dependency manifests is through the uncritical and one-directional adoption of theoretical and methodological frameworks typically developed in the Global North. In the field of tourism, this can result in the uncritical application of models and approaches that are not necessarily relevant to the Latin American context. It is essential to reflect on the appropriateness of these frameworks and to foster the development of models that are context-specific and locally rooted. Additionally, thinking from the perspective of exclusion and invisibility involves problematizing the discursive formations that shape both thought and *praxis* in the field. This raises critical discussions about the concept of "useful science" promoted under neoliberalism.

Conversely, it invites a rethinking of prioritization criteria from a pluralistic standpoint, emphasizing the need to challenge and problematize the geographies of power.

Secondly, the dual issue of scientific knowledge, structured both in its production and circulation, was addressed. From this perspective, the challenge is not only to incorporate and analyze the actors and productions rendered invisible by dominant historiographical developments but also to critically examine the impact of regional productions and publications. This introduces the concept of barriers—linguistic, economic, symbolic, and others—and underscores the importance of fostering knowledge production capable of engaging in broader contexts. At the same time, it is acknowledged that studying the expansion of the field in the region cannot be separated from the rules that regulate research and academic practices. For this reason, this work aimed to overcome some of these barriers while refraining from proposing entirely new horizons.

Finally, considering cultural and tourism studies involves rethinking the processes traditionally used to study territories and their symbolic references, within a context where neoliberalism has profoundly shaped Latin American cultural dynamics. Problematizing possible approaches is not only an exercise in thematic updating but also a way to open new horizons for recognizing and interpreting cultural processes linked to tourism in a contextualized and prioritized manner. In this light, the importance of expanding horizons to embrace diversity, in contrast to the neoliberal tendency toward cultural commodification, is more relevant than ever.

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