



OPEN ACCESS

EDITED BY
Gabi Mocatta,
University of Tasmania, Australia

REVIEWED BY
Bernardo Motta,
Roger Williams University, United States

*CORRESPONDENCE
Eloisa Beling Loose
✉ eloisa.beling@gmail.com

RECEIVED 14 October 2024
ACCEPTED 16 January 2025
PUBLISHED 31 January 2025

CITATION
Beling Loose E (2025) Environmental
journalism from Brazil: trajectory and
challenges for research.
Front. Commun. 10:1511262.
doi: 10.3389/fcomm.2025.1511262

COPYRIGHT
© 2025 Beling Loose. This is an open-access
article distributed under the terms of the
[Creative Commons Attribution License \(CC
BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). The use, distribution or reproduction in
other forums is permitted, provided the
original author(s) and the copyright owner(s)
are credited and that the original publication
in this journal is cited, in accordance with
accepted academic practice. No use,
distribution or reproduction is permitted
which does not comply with these terms.

Environmental journalism from Brazil: trajectory and challenges for research

Eloisa Beling Loose*

Communication Department, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, Brazil

This article, based on a literature review and documentary research, retraces the trajectory outlined by environmental journalism research in the Brazilian context. It does so by discussing the development of the field in other countries, especially those in the Global North, where most of the research and publications are largely concentrated. It also presents epistemological aspects of Latin American communication and the critique of environmental coloniality, present in the constitution of what can be called the ecological literacy of journalists covering the subject.

KEYWORDS

environmental journalism, Latin American communication, decoloniality, Brazil, research

1 Introduction

In Latin America in general, and in Brazil specifically, communication studies and journalism have long been shaped (and dominated) by the hegemonic-capitalist system, based on the training of professionals with a Northern perspective taught in local universities (Suzina and Sartoretto, 2021) and a political-economic structuring of communication vehicles geared toward concentration (Fonsêca, 2017). This scenario generates representations of reality that are not plural and erases manifestations that are not of interest or do not fit into its production logic, thus sustaining a cultural homogenization of themes, approaches, sources of information, etc.

The hegemonic worldview today is associated with the Global North, while other visions, which seek space and recognition, are often related to the Global South. Then, the diversity of knowledge(s) of the Global South, which go beyond scientific knowledge, continues to be neglected by the mainstream press (and, consequently, by studies on environmental journalism in Brazil). Ijuim (2020) points out that this stems from the journalistic models themselves, designed to use news values that shape a way of seeing the world for journalists, which coincides with modern Western thinking, which fragments reality in order to know it, and does not welcome difference, or that which does not conform to what is already established.

From this viewpoint, although the history of environmental journalism tends to focus on North America and Europe, there is a lot of work in the South, including work associated with considerable risks, since economies are heavily dependent on the exploitation of nature (Sachsman and Valenti, 2020). Despite its almost international invisibility, examining Brazilian environmental journalism, we seek to highlight that, since its inception, it has been aligned with the disruption of monocultures of the mind (Shiva, 1993). Since the beginning of research in this area, Brazilian researchers has claimed your revolutionary character, committed to changing paradigms and (e.g.

Bueno, 2007; Dornelles, 2008) and the possibility of building another relationship between society and nature.

2 Foundations of Brazilian environmental journalism

Studies on environmental journalism in Brazil emerge from the intersection of ecological critique and the Latin American perspective on communication, which also questions the asymmetric relationship between the Global North and South. As proposed by Mattelart and Dorfman (1977) and Beltrán and Cardona (1982), among others, from the 1960s onwards, cultural imperialism would continue despite the newly acquired political independence of many countries in the Global South. That power relation extends to journalism: “Due to the absence of Third World news agencies and a lack of correspondents for Third World newspapers, most news about these countries, even in their own newspapers, is channeled through First World news agencies and inevitably shows a Western perspective” (Dijk, 1995, p. 26). This perspective was updated with new strategies of media imperialism and intellectual imperialism, such as US scholarships for the training of Brazilian journalists (as if local training was not qualified) and the tactic of silencing the voices of Latin American academics in scientific research on the region in which they live (Albuquerque, 2024).

Although written nearly three decades ago, van Dijk’s claim that journalism tends to “play down the direct or indirect effects or legacies of Western colonialism, corporate practices, military intervention, international trade, and politics” (Ibidem) remains valid. In looking at environmental journalism from a decolonial perspective, our argument is twofold. Firstly, the administration, exploitation and control of nature is an expression of coloniality (Mignolo, 2017), which allowed the rapid advance of Modernity for the exploitative countries but is present in different scales and situations to this day. Secondly, we continue to face journalistic coloniality itself (Góes, 2017), which legitimizes and allows the continuity of this and other practices based on the ideology of dominant elites.

Historically, Brazilian environmental coverage has been driven by social movements advocating for greater care for nature at a time when society itself was becoming aware of the issue. Since the 1970s, there have been journalists who have regularly reported on the topic in the Brazilian press, but it was during the preparations for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was held in the city of Rio de Janeiro in 1992, that environmental journalism expanded. During the preparatory events for Rio-92, the Rio Grande do Sul¹ Ecojournalists’ Group was created in 1990, the first Brazilian organization to bring together journalists engaged in the environmental struggle (Loose and Belmonte, 2023). Eight years later, a national network was created—the Brazilian Environmental Journalism Network—aimed at strengthening journalistic practice in the environmental area and promoting

exchanges between state organizations, especially through the holding of national congresses.

The popularization of the internet has allowed new spaces for journalistic activity, proving to be fertile ground for the emergence of alternative and independent media outlets focused on environmental issues, such as the website *O Eco*, founded in 2004 and still active today. This professional growth was also reflected in studies in the area, which spread to all regions of Brazil, diversifying the perspectives and practices of coverage.

3 Environmental journalism studies

Bueno (2007), one of the pioneering Brazilian researchers in this field, advocates for activism in favor of environmental care and the necessity of listening to information sources with perspectives different from those reinforcing hegemonic thought. Dornelles (2008) states that this journalism seeks to replace the fragmentary nature of the profession’s traditional practices with a new attitude based on greater attention to each topic, something that connects to systemic thinking (Capra, 2002).

Other assumptions for journalism committed to a worldview that breaks the dichotomy between society and nature have been developed over the years, especially within the Environmental Journalism Research Group (EJRG) at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Since the late 1990s, the group’s coordinator, Ilza Girardi, has worked to promote ecological literacy in the training of future journalists and environmental communication researchers. Formalized in 2008, EJRG has become a reference in Brazil and Latin America, due to its continuous and significant knowledge production, as well as its contribution to the training of new researchers in the field (Bueno, 2024). It should be noted that the development of studies in this area began during this period, with only sporadic work on journalism and the environment prior to 2002 (Bueno, 2007). During this time, there was a scarcity of Portuguese-language literature and few researchers interested in the field, often facing devaluation because, in journalistic terms, the environment was considered a less prestigious topic (Loose and Belmonte, 2023).

Over its more than 15 years of uninterrupted activities, the EJRG has conducted dozens of studies on environmental coverage across different media outlets, employing various thematic approaches and methodologies. A national mapping of scientific production in the area was carried out from 1987 to 2010, which allowed researchers to observe the development of studies and a conceptual confusion between environmental journalism and journalism that covers the environment impartially, without adhering to environmental epistemology (Girardi et al., 2015; Gavirati, 2013). This diagnosis guided researchers in constructing a theoretical framework that highlights the specificities of this type of journalism: (1) emphasis on contextualization; (2) plurality of voices; (3) assimilation of environmental knowledge; (4) systemic coverage closely aligned with the public’s reality; (5) commitment to the quality of information; and (6) responsibility for changing mindsets (e.g., Loose and Girardi, 2017).

The deepening of epistemological aspects led to a convergence with decolonial studies, revealing a close relationship with Latin American communication (e.g., Suzina and Sartoretto, 2021;

1 A relevant state in the ecological struggle, where the first Association for the Protection of the Environment, Agapan, was created in 1971, and where important environmental figures were born, such as Henrique Luiz Roessler and José Lutzenberger.

Torrice Villanueva, 2019), including strong connections with the teachings of Freire (2011). We mapped the points of convergence between the literature of Environmental Journalism and Freire's postulates, identifying at least four points: (1) criticism of coloniality, (2) dialogicity, (3) learning through experience and (4) emancipation and liberation (Girardi et al., 2023).

More recently, criticism of environmental coloniality (Walsh, 2008; Mignolo, 2017) has emerged as these studies gain traction and are strengthened in Brazilian universities, and the debate on climate justice gains more visibility. These approaches are interrelated and integrate the environmental perspective adopted by this journalism.

It is worth mentioning that during this period other research groups were created or focused on environmental journalism, qualifying discussions in the field. Furthermore, since 2007 the EJRJG has organized the National Meeting of Researchers in Environmental Journalism to generate exchanges between those interested in the area and strengthen the literature from Brazil.

4 Advances in environmental coverage

As multiple crises, especially the climate emergency, overlap, environmental coverage has gained more space in the media. However, the colonial mindset that reduces nature to a natural resource still predominates, and "knowledge brought by the Global North promotes the devaluation and denial of ways of existing and understanding the world of those who perceive themselves as part of (and not external to) the environment" (Loose and Girardi, 2021, p. 324).

Although there is a growing number of journalistic products addressing climate change, deforestation, and pollution, environmental journalism is distinguished by questioning how these issues are presented to the public. For example, many solutions to environmental problems originate from the North and are based on technologies that require financial investment. On the other hand, local initiatives are often devalued or even ignored because they lack the technical-scientific recognition considered universal, a consequence of Eurocentric thinking that spread during the colonial era but persists to this day (Loose and Resende, 2024).

Today, there is more environmental journalism because journalistic formats and media have diversified. Although mainstream journalism still plays a significant role due to its reach, it is through other forms of journalism, detached from the political-economic power of major media corporations, that alternative voices and approaches to environmental issues can be found—though this does not happen as frequently as desired (Loose, 2024). Activists, forest peoples and traditional communities, for example, are consulted by journalists today more than in the past.

In recent years, there has been an increase in media attention to environmental issues, driven by the rise in disasters resulting from the intensification of the climate crisis and the dismantling policies of the Jair Bolsonaro government (2019–2022). Environmental coverage has become more transversal, addressing social, economic, political, and everyday interfaces (Girardi et al., 2020), but it still lacks frequency and, in some cases, depth, with a critical view of the discourses that support our unsustainable status quo.

There is also a shift in the direction of what drives the practice. The informative and pedagogical functions of environmental journalism (Bueno, 2007) were what took priority in the first decades, but today "[...] the emphasis is on the political function, which in some cases is seen as advocacy journalism" (Loose and Belmonte, 2023, E1594). A greater pro-environmental stance is identified, in the face of the undeniable destruction that is being imposed.

5 Discussion: challenges to be overcome

Although the climate emergency has boosted interest in the field of journalism, which is reflected in research, the hegemonic journalistic logic continues to make the roots of the problems invisible and present palliative solutions, such as the carbon market, that do not change the structures that contribute to the intensification of damage. Even alternative media outlets tend to reproduce what is already published in mainstream media outlets, giving little space to alternatives to a concept of development that is not synonymous with infinite growth (Loose, 2024).

In terms of research, we identified a fragmentation of the area, with peaks of academic attention, after peaks of media attention, but which do not always manage to continue in the area due to a lack of funding and a consolidated space within Communication or Journalism courses. The fact that a subject in the environmental field is not mandatory means that there are no vacancies in universities for professionals who dedicate themselves to the topic and prevents future journalists from having contact with the debate from the beginning, apart from professors who offer optional subjects because they believe in the relevance of the debate.

The same occurs in graduate studies. Few professors can dedicate themselves solely to environmental journalism, either because there are other institutional demands or because the lack of contact with the environmental perspective generates less demand than other approaches and themes worked on since undergraduate studies. This shows that, when we talk about curriculum, even though there are guidelines that signal the importance of the theme, the discourse of transversality does not always contribute to ecological literacy that promotes a deconstruction of the idea of separation between humanity and nature.

It is worth highlighting the structural barriers of non-English-speaking countries and the lack of support for participating in circuits that require payment, either to publish or to access foreign production. The reality of research in the Global South differs greatly from that of the North, starting with the hours of work not dedicated to research that accumulate in the workday. These and other strategies contribute to maintaining the dynamics of marginalization of the epistemological perspectives of scholars from the Global South, reinforcing the (false) idea that science done in the United States and Europe is universal.

Even in terms of journalistic production, newsrooms do not encourage continuous production or hire specialized professionals. Despite an expanded environmental agenda, resulting from the negative effects of the climate crisis, there is a lack of long-term programs to sustain such practices, while also opening the door to greenwashing—and consequently more environmental injustices—through financing companies that aim to have a positive

image, despite their activities being unsustainable. In addition to strengthening alternative initiatives, such as Sumaúma and Amazônia Real, it is necessary to spread the environmental perspective in the media dominated by the economic ideology.

The environmental journalism research in Brazil needs to look at the broader field of Communication, reconnecting with the contestatory principles of Latin American criticism, to collaborate with the reflection on how to decolonize our journalism. The challenge is to overcome criticism and provide support for another practice, consistent with the reality of the Global South.

Author contributions

EB: Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References

- Albuquerque, A. (2024). Media, intellectual, and cultural imperialism today. *Hist. Media Stud.* 4, 1–19. doi: 10.32376/d895a0ea.048bbc6b
- Beltrán, L. R., and Cardona, E. F. (1982). *Comunicação dominada: os Estados Unidos e os meios de comunicação da América Latina*. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra.
- Bueno, W. (2007). *Comunicação, Jornalismo e meio Ambiente: Teoria e Pesquisa*. São Paulo: Majoara.
- Bueno, W. (2024). A importância dos grupos de pesquisa para a legitimação e consolidação da Comunicação Ambiental no Brasil. *JCOM – Am. Latina* 07:A01. doi: 10.22323/3.07010201
- Capra, F. (2002). *The Hidden Connections: A Science for Sustainable Living*. London: Flamingo.
- Dijk, T. A. (1995). “Power and the news media,” in *Political Communication in Action*, ed. D. Paletz (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press), 9–36.
- Dornelles, B. (2008). The end of objectivity and neutrality in civic and environmental journalism. *Braz. Journal. Res.* 4, 108–118. doi: 10.25200/BJR.v4n2.2008.152
- Fonsêca, D. (2017). *Regulatory framework of the Brazilian Media System*. Media Ownership Monitor Brazil. Available at: https://brazil.mom-gmr.org/uploads/tx_lfmgom/documents/MOM_Documento_legal_ingles_1_.pdf (accessed August 20, 2024).
- Freire, P. (2011). *Extensão ou Comunicação?* São Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Gavirati, P. (2013). “Mediatizar el ambiente, ambientalizar los medios: tensiones en torno al discurso periodístico sobre el cambio climático,” in *Proceedings of the Jornadas Internacionales Medios de Comunicación y Cambio Climático* (Facultad de Comunicación de la Universidad de Sevilla). Available at: <https://idus.us.es/handle/11441/30820> (accessed August 15, 2024).
- Girardi, I. M. T., Loose, E. B., and Camana, A. (2015). Panorama da pesquisa em Jornalismo Ambiental no Brasil: o estado da arte das dissertações e teses entre 1987 e 2010. *InTexto* 34, 362–384. doi: 10.19132/1807-8583201534.362-384
- Girardi, I. M. T., Loose, E. B., and Steigleder, D. G. (2020). “Ampliação e transversalização da pauta ambiental no jornal nacional,” in *Comunicação y Cambio Climático: Contribuciones Actuales*, 1st Edn., eds. R. Fernández-Reyes, D. Rodrigo-Cano, and I. M. Girardi (Sevilla: Ediciones Egregius), 15–34.
- Girardi, I. M. T., Moraes, C. H., Loose, E. B., and Steigleder, D. G. (2023). Aproximações do Jornalismo Ambiental com o pensamento de Paulo Freire. *Ambitos. Rev. Int. Comun.* 60, 134–148. doi: 10.12795/Ambitos.2023.i60.07
- Góes, J. C. (2017). *O jornalismo e a experiência do invisível: identidades, lusofonias e a visível herança colonial brasileira*. Tese (Doutorado em Comunicação Social). Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais.
- Ijuim, J. K. (2020). A racionalidade moderna e as distorções dos critérios de noticiabilidade. *Triade* 8, 117–138. doi: 10.22484/2318-5694.2020v8n1p117-138
- Loose, E. B. (2024). *Jornalismo e Crise Climático: Um Estudo Desde o Sul Global Sobre os Vínculos do Jornalismo com a Colonialidade*, 1st Edn. Florianópolis: Insular.
- Loose, E. B., and Belmonte, R. V. (2023). Activism in environmental journalism: how four key moments have helped shape an engagement practice in Brazil. *Braz. Journal. Res.* 19. doi: 10.25200/BJR.v19n3.2023.1594
- Loose, E. B., and Girardi, I. M. T. (2017). O Jornalismo Ambiental sob a ótica dos riscos climáticos. *Interin* 22, 154–172. doi: 10.35168/1980-5276.UTP.interin.2017.Vol22.N2.pp154-172
- Loose, E. B., and Girardi, I. M. T. (2021). Interfaces entre o debate colonial e os estudos de jornalismo ambiental. *Rev. Desenvolv. Meio Ambiente.* 58, 319–333. doi: 10.5380/dma.v58i0.75877
- Loose, E. B., and Resende, V. (2024). Searching for a Southern perspective on climate coverage: a contribution from critical discourse studies. *Intercom. Rev. Bras. Ciênc. Comun.* 47:e2024107. doi: 10.1590/1809-58442024107pt
- Mattelart, A., and Dorfman, A. (1977). *Para ler o Pato Donald: Comunicação de massa e colonialismo*. São Paulo: Paz e Terra.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2017). Colonialidade: o lado mais escuro da modernidade. *Rev. Bras. Ciênc. Sociais.* 32, 1–18. doi: 10.17666/329402/2017
- Sachsman, D., and Valenti, J. M. (Eds) (2020). *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Journalism*. New York, NY: Routledge. doi: 10.4324/9781351068406
- Shiva, V. (1993). *Monocultures of the Mind*. London, NJ: Zed Books Ltd.
- Suzina, A., and Sartoretto, P. M. (2021). *Dossiê Pensamento Comunicacional Latino-americano: Desafios e perspectivas da des-ocidentalização no Sul Global Volume I: Reencontros e estranhamentos*. Loughborough: Loughborough University. Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/14273558.v1> (accessed August 15, 2024).
- Torrío Villanueva, E. (2019). Para uma comunicação ex cêntrica. *MATRIZes* 13, 89–107. doi: 10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v13i3p89-107
- Walsh, C. (2008). Interculturalidad, plurinacionalidad y decolonialidad: las insurgencias político-epistémicas de refundar el Estado. *Tabula Rasa Bogotá* 9, 131–152. doi: 10.25058/20112742.343

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author(s) declare that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Publisher's note

All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers. Any product that may be evaluated in this article, or claim that may be made by its manufacturer, is not guaranteed or endorsed by the publisher.