

A Decolonial Approach to the Scope of Knowledge Power in Latin America

Written by José Mario Suárez Martínez, Oliver Alexander Zamudio Pulido and Alessandro Biazzi Couto

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JOSÉ MARIO SUÁREZ MARTÍNEZ, OLIVER ALEXANDER ZAMUDIO PULIDO AND ALESSANDRO BIAZZI COUTO, SEP 8 2025

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To (re)think the (de)colonization of the social sciences, the relations of production and social change and the visibility/invisibility of historically underrepresented groups, such as the Afro-descendant population and Indigenous communities in the region, it is necessary to make a critical balance of the links between the so-called left cycles in the region, and their relationship or not, with the policies of transformation of the colonality of knowledge-power. The authors of this chapter recognize that the episteme linked to knowledge is associated with the so-called traditional currents of the so-called classics in the social sciences. In this sense, decoloniality is also an effort based on knowledge without ignoring other types of epistemologies born in the West. Recognizing some of its potentialities and epistemological proposals invites us to build a transhistorical horizontal dialogue. The decolonization of power sounds, in many areas and in scientific disciplines, like an appeal to an essentialized, exotic, wild, premodern or irrational past. The changes in the relations of production of knowledge, science and power, and not only in the identity representation of professional scientists and politicians, imply a positive debate for scientific epistemology, in the sense of overcoming the limits of science.

Processes linked to new institutions, forms of scientific exploration, objects and methods of scientific collaboration between South-South countries and in a decolonial sense, imply an important reflection on other ways of thinking about politics, from scales of local representations to proposals for the State-Society relationship and its geopolitical impact. Both the production of knowledge and the political representation of underrepresented groups and knowledge bring relational categories such as race, gender and class to the discussion. It is hoped that this representation will be deeper in the relations of knowledge production at a global level. In short, decoloniality is an epistemological-political commitment that helps to position these issues in the academic and political sphere.

The questions that guide this research are two: what is the role of decoloniality compared to other epistemological currents of thought? And what are the political implications of this current in the Latin American turn to the left? Based on these questions, below are some reflections that are not intended to exhaust the topic, but rather to open dialogue.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, to understand the epistemological and political proposal of decoloniality, the characteristics of two traditions that have guided the production of scientific knowledge during much of the 20th and 21st centuries are described: the empirical-analytical tradition and the historical-hermeneutic tradition. The objective of this lies in distinguishing the postulates of these that give rise to decolonial criticism. It is argued that the Latin American current is advancing on them, which helps rethink the current political effervescence. After that, in the second section some of the epistemological and political assumptions of decoloniality as other knowledge are reviewed, and it is proposed that it can be understood both as a critical scientific community and as a research paradigm. Subsequently, representation is discussed in light of decoloniality and the scope of knowledge and power

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in Latin America is reviewed, paying attention to recent political events in Colombia. Finally, some conclusions are added based on the authors' interests in questioning both the alternative production of knowledge and the great challenges for the region.

The Epistemological Watershed of the Decolonial Turn: The Empirical-Analytical Tradition and Historical-Hermeneutics

To understand the emergence of decoloniality as other knowledge that is constituted as a systemic, complex and holistic view of the realities of the global south, the authors of this work consider it necessary to analyze the characteristics of the two most important traditions in terms of knowledge production. Scientific refers to: the empirical-analytical, and the historical-hermeneutic traditions. The reason for this is that decoloniality in a certain sense was born as a critique of both traditions.

Before doing so, it is worth mentioning that both the empirical-analytical and historical-hermeneutic traditions can be understood as research paradigms, as conceived by Thomas Kuhn (1996). For this author, paradigms are necessary to sustain statements as long as they are accompanied by a scientific community that defends them and sustains their principles of beliefs, values and premises. The scientific community is conceived by the author as groups of scientists who share a paradigm, and generally develop the stage of normal science (Kuhn 1996).

The distinction between normal science and scientific revolution is essential for Kuhn. The first consists of the moment in which a paradigm is in its most valid stage and when the knowledge produced does not question the premises of said paradigm. On the other hand, scientific revolutions occur when these, in their normal stage, exhaust their explanatory capacity and begin to be questioned. In addition to these notions, Kuhn also introduces the concept of incommensurability, which accounts for the inability to translate two paradigms into a common language. From the definition offered in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, it could be argued that the empirical-analytical tradition is incommensurable with the historical-hermeneutics, since its ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as its ways of conceiving the world and practicing science, are different from each other.

The empirical-analytical tradition has a long history that can be traced back to the works of the dominating scientific thinkers of modernity: Newton, Hume, etc. However, in the nascent social sciences, positivism emerged as its most prominent representative. At that time, positive social science regarded mimicking the appearance of natural science as a means to consolidate objective scientific knowledge, free from prejudice. Later, in the 20th century, the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle gave continuity to the tradition from the premises of the hypothetico-deductive method.

Broadly speaking, the empirical-analytic tradition is based on an objective knowledge of reality that is possible through an epistemological dualism consisting of the subject-object separation. Thus, the elements of reality are reified in order to be analyzed. Additionally, its purpose is the causal explanation of reality through the formulation of universal statements (Pasek and Matos 2006), which gives science a generalizing capacity.

From the perspective of the empirical-analytical tradition, for scientific communities to be operable, they must have a production of knowledge that takes into account critical capacity, universality, a logical foundation, that is communicable and that has a claim to objectivity (Pardo 2012).

Heir to the hypothetical deductive method of the Vienna Circle, Popper (1973) maintains that it is essential to subject all scientific statements to constant falsificationism to demonstrate their scientific validity. No matter how much evidence accumulates around a theoretical statement, if said statement is not falsifiable, it will not have a scientific character (Popper, 1973). The advancement of this position favors a demarcation between the scientific and the non-scientific (metaphysics), which can be translated into a differentiation between the rational and the irrational. According to the method of critical rationalism, the advancement of science is promoted only through conjectures and refutations, provided that the replicability of the facts is guaranteed (Maxwell 2017).

Another of the relevant elements for the empirical-analytical tradition are the contributions on the psychology of the

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researcher and the logic of knowledge revelation (Lakatos 1983). For Lakatos, the objectivity of science does not lie precisely in its progressiveness, it can also be regressive and contain anomalies that must be corrected. Furthermore, scientific statements that are not subjected to epistemological surveillance in strict terms can be branded as pseudoscientific. For this reason, it is essential to use auxiliary hypotheses that protect scientific statements from possible refutation scenarios (Callaghan 2019).

However, some aspects concomitant to the empirical-analytical tradition, such as 'scientific progress' or the idea of 'evolution' were harshly criticized by philosophy and the social sciences, particularly by the Frankfurt School. Some of these critiques were the questioning between knowledge and capitalism turned into ideology and culture. One of the most important exponents of this school is Jürgen Habermas (1998), who became one of the most prominent critics of the instrumental rationality that supported the modern project. Habermasian criticism goes beyond the analytical tension, it offers an alternative: communicative rationality. In summary, the Frankfurt school provided some fundamental steps for epistemic turns not only from the questioning of knowledge production, but also from the historical and ideological production relations that overlap them.

The historical-hermeneutic tradition, also called the interpretive turn, meant the implementation of an alternative paradigm to the positivist and, in general, to the empirical-analytic tradition. Unlike the latter, in which it is maintained that the production of knowledge is governed by a subject-object relationship, in the historical-hermeneutic tradition a knowledge relationship of the subject-subject type is conceived; that is, it is assumed that the researcher is immersed in the reality of the study and cannot separate himself from it. This has several implications and perhaps the most important is that, instead of expecting social science to construct causal explanations, it strives for the search for meaning and its understanding. Another consideration is the relevance of the point of view of the researcher and the subjects investigated; this recognition is considered to be substantive for the analytical reconstruction of reality.

Although the origin of this tradition can be traced to Dilthey's (1883) differentiation between the natural sciences and the spiritual sciences, its underlying assumptions are clearly stated in the work of the German sociologist Max Weber, most notably in his concept of 'meaning in an action' (Weber 1998, 8). Furthermore, in the named Abya Yala, other non-Western traditions are identified, as occurred with Nahua philosophy for whom the spirit resembled a philosophical critique from its mythical-religious perspective (León Portilla 2007; Márquez Duarte 2021).

In addition to the criticisms of the Frankfurt School and the ideologies who promoted a neo-Marxist reading, there are two other large post-structuralist critical communities: postcolonial studies and the decolonial current. Postcolonial studies emerged in the United States from a group of researchers from Asia. One of his most important critiques was (and remains) the idea of Europe as an epicenter.

Historians like Edward Said asked themselves: What is the role of the East in shaping the modern world? In these currents, the criticism of the historical-hermeneutic tradition plays a key role, since it returns interest in the author's point of view and it is recognized that knowledge is immersed in specific contexts that must be understood both from the subjects who investigate as well as the subjects who are investigated.

Now, decoloniality emerges as a critique of hegemonic Western epistemological traditions that dominate the production of knowledge and impose a Eurocentric conception of the world that excludes alternative ways of understanding. However, the ideographic context from which it is born as a paradigm and is constituted as a critical scientific community is permeated by the two traditions analyzed. As will be seen in the next section, decoloniality does not completely detach itself from the epistemological burden that gave rise to it, but rather seeks to reconfigure it to build an alternative. Below, some conceptual elements of decoloniality are presented based on two dimensions: knowledge and power.

Decoloniality as an Epistemological and Political Proposal: Assumptions of Knowledge and Power

Decoloniality as a scientific community can be historically situated in the year 2003 with the founding of the modernity/coloniality research group in the city of Bogotá. Heir to some postcolonial approaches, decoloniality

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emerged in Latin America and the Caribbean as a philosophical current in which it sought, among many other elements, to a) deconstruct both the production of Eurocentric knowledge from the concepts and from the practices and subjects that construct and are referred to by the concepts, b) decenter the universality of certain agendas (for example Human Rights or multiculturalism) and thus create a horizon of possibility towards plurality, and c) reflect and rescue the ideas of anti-capitalist, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. events in the southern hemisphere.

For Anibal Quijano, a precursor of criticism to Eurocentric epistemic and political production, there is a coloniality of power and knowledge that has been unknown to other ancestral traditions (Quijano 2014). An example of this is the way in which the ideas of the aforementioned authors have remained the maximum epistemological references. For Quijano (1997), modernity/coloniality should not be detached from the capitalist configuration of a racial and class order that has globally configured the world-system. In terms of the nation-state, the civilizational matrix occurs both in the system and within the units that make up the system.

The idea of a world-system from a global approach invites us to reflect on efforts to understand the mechanisms of center-periphery domination, underdevelopment, theories of dependency and the issue of imperialism as precedents. The Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch (1981) is credited with being the pioneer in the creation of this tradition of thought; the efforts of the Peruvian Marxist intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui decades before (1979) are also recognized. Both exerted a strong influence on some intellectuals in the region. Particularly in those that, in the recent context, promote a deep criticism of Eurocentrism, the relations of knowledge production and aspects of the critical analysis of neoliberal globalization.

Broadly speaking, for the purposes of this document, decoloniality can be read in light of some ideas established in classical epistemological paradigms. Following Kuhn's idea, this can be conceived as a critical scientific community of the places in which the concepts of the social sciences and humanities were produced. Lakatos' idea can also be found since it questions who has produced the knowledge and what are the effects of such concepts in terms of global north-south. Although the discussion began from a scientific struggle, its impact transcends the social sciences and humanities given its philosophical and political nature.

Following some decolonial authors, the historical configuration of Latin America is marked by the processes of physical and symbolic colonization, knowledge and power (Mignolo 2014). It should be noted that Europe as a region and Eurocentrism as a concept are not static ideas. As some decolonial currents suggest, in the north there are also souths and in the south, there are norths, that is, there are hegemonic grammars in both the south and the north. The main criticism rather lies in a pragmatic vision in which knowledge and political practices of the global south that are not part of the scientific formality have been historically invisibilized.

As far as knowledge is concerned, if we follow the relationship between knowledge and epistemology, the cosmovision of certain Indigenous peoples are loaded with their own knowledge, and knowledge is not science, therefore it is not subjected to a process of refutation of their statements as occurs with the Kuhnian perspective presented. Although there is not a refutation process, that knowledge of the communities is vital for social interaction and the creation of shared universes of meaning in certain communities. A cosmovision is defined as the ideas about the universe, nature and human beings (Florescano 2000).

Without losing sight of a critical perspective, it is worth questioning how within this globalized world there can still be small strategies for the production of knowledge that do not reproduce the Eurocentric vision that has given meaning to the modern world (Dussel 1977). To respond to these concerns, we use two points: one based in terms of scientific communities referring to the decolonial position and another, from the rescue of the local alternative practices. Namely:

- A. Decoloniality can be conceived as a community of knowledge that questions the places from which hegemonic science has been made, as well as an exercise in the recovery of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, popular, subaltern, sexually diverse authors, subjects and movements, among others, which have been made invisible by the so-called classical currents.
- B. Locally, there has always been other knowledge beyond the so-called Eurocentric production; specifically in

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the global south as postcolonial studies show. For some defenders of colonialism, the production of knowledge is founded on the hegemonic civilizational scientific vision of the positivist, global knowledge, for example, 'to neoliberalism as an economic project' (Lander 2000, 4 with own emphasis). In contrast with pragmatic universals, situated knowledge does not seek a condition of universality.

These two points do not imply ignoring scientific knowledge or the epistemological currents described in the first section, rather it invites a critical exercise of the theoretical references reviewed, coupled with the difficulty of the difference between natural sciences and social sciences. Regarding the last point we refer to the difficulty of scientific advancements in the social sciences given their changing, dynamic, relational and, as some decolonials suggest, contextual nature (Grosfoguel 2006).

The challenge is even stronger when one considers that scientific projects, both natural and social sciences, are generally produced by the regions of the global north; This exercise has been called colonial science or scientific colonialism (Espinoza et al. 2020). Another example in which the hegemony of research is demonstrated is the one named *Parachute Science*, a term that refers to the analysis made by researchers from the global north who use countries in the global south without investing in some type of human support or infrastructure (Villafuerte 2020)

Representation from Decoloniality. Scope of Knowledge-power in Latin America

Scientific representation highlights the interests of certain communities on some research topics and agendas of normative interest (Olive 2013). The agendas show that the production of knowledge is not a purely objective practice, it is crossed by a perspective of the duty to know. As far as power is concerned, there are many ways to analyze the effects of colonialism in terms of the hierarchical production of society as the modern civilizational project was produced. One of these paths has to do with the representation of historically invisible subjects in spaces of knowledge production or political representation that is generally oriented towards a reading of 'ethnic minorities'.

If we return to the articulations of who produces knowledge, typical of the historical-hermeneutic tradition, in a racially hierarchical society, it is possible to guide two key questions: Which subjects represent and develop the scientific and political agendas in the region? What are the characteristics of these subjects in terms of race, class and gender?

The year 2022 was crucial for the political victories of the left in the region. The rise of Gustavo Petro in Colombia and the second victory of Lula Da Silva in Brazil are two of the clearest examples of the crystallization of some political struggles in the global south. Although both presidents are heterosexual male subjects, their election translated into a horizon of possibility for the political representation of groups historically named as 'minority'. The representation of people under an ethnic-racial reading has historically been assumed as a representation of 'minorities' (Martínez et al, 2008). This minority reading diminishes both the political agency of these subjects and the production of their knowledge. One of the key achievements of various decolonial positions, or ethnic revitalization, has been to rescue their ancestral practices to demonstrate their validity and not just their racializing folklorism (Díaz-Polanco 2005).

The Indigenous and black communities in Latin America also do not allude to a minority issue in demographic terms. For countries like Colombia, the black population represents approximately 10% of the population, for Brazil, more than 50%. Another peculiar example is Bolivia and the more than 60% of Indigenous people who make its plurinational character; Mexico, on the other hand, has an estimated 10% Indigenous population and approximately 2.5% Afro-Mexican population (Heinelt & Stoiber 2020). Ethnic-racial differentiability and its relationship with representation in spaces of knowledge and power production become even more complex if the class and gender variables are added. For example, representatives of female politicians from low Indigenous or Afro-descendant socioeconomic strata.

Colombia is one of the most emblematic cases to analyze the advances in terms of political representation of underrepresented groups in terms of the shift to the left in the region. Representation from a traditional political perspective refers to the presence of certain subjects or groups in a space with decision-making at the national or

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subnational level (Criado 2012). The absence of racialized groups in these spaces is the most evident example of the continuation of racism, specifically in countries of the Southern Cone (Mutsaku 2005). As noted above, epistemological and political exclusion ignores any form of recognition of their knowledge and practices.

In August 2022, Francia Márquez Mina, originally from La Toma, municipality of Suárez, Cauca, Colombia, was elected vice president of the Republic. The current vice president embodies various categories that have permeated research on intersectionality in the social sciences: class, gender, race. The class is sustained by her rural and poor origin since she presented herself biographically as a domestic worker. The second, gender, due to her self-identification as a feminist woman; that is, her gender identification in addition to her political position. The third, race, in terms of her self-identification as black.

In her campaign as a candidate for vice president, Francia Márquez toured the so-called 'forgotten regions' of Colombia; the other Colombia, the deep Colombia. These regions are generally inhabited by people ethnically differentiated (Indigenous, black population, and peasants). The transit through this other Colombia was not only empirical, it was also discursive. One of the cosmogonic emblems of the Colombian Pacific region is *Vivir Sabroso*. This emblem was used during the campaign inviting citizens to vote for the Pact under the slogan *Vamos a vivir sabroso!*

Vivir Sabroso has been understood as a philosophy in terms of establishing a position that questions reality and the reason for what is empirically observable. In terms of ancestral knowledge, it implies two African worldviews such as ubuntu and muntu. The first refers to the construction of relationships with other people while the muntu is a totalizing vision (Mena & Menses, 2023).

In addition to Francia Márquez, in the course of President Gustavo Petro's presidency, two other black women have been elected as vice ministers. Both women are originally from the Colombian Pacific: Angela Yesenia Olaya Requene, Minister of Science and Social Appropriation of Knowledge, and Aurora Vergara Figueroa, Minister of Education. Both black women represent an advance in the classical deconstruction of knowledge given that they occupy two areas of political representation in ministries oriented towards the dissemination and advancement of education.

While Angela Olaya has a PhD in Anthropology from the Autonomous University of Mexico, Aurora Vergara Figueroa has a PhD in Sociology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Although both come from communities with a strong ethnic-racial spectrum, their academic training led them to study the positivist traditions of educational training in Western environments. For this reason, it is key not to ignore the positivist tradition or the analytical empirical tradition since this is transversal to every person who participates in the formal educational model, specifically at a university and postgraduate level in the region (Lander 2000).

In a similar way to *Sumak Kawsay* (*Buen Vivir*) in the Andean region, *Vivir Sabroso* invites us to rethink the way of understanding community development in a national or plurinational key. In this sense, *Vivir Sabroso* is not only an everyday expression, it is part of 'a model of spiritual, social, economic, political and cultural organization of harmony with the environment, with nature and with people' (Reyes-Haczek 2022, 4). We start from political recognition and not from the decolonization of academic knowledge. Criticism of decolonial studies lie in the absence of scientific rigor and the nominal characteristics of who produces this decolonial knowledge.

To remedy the absence of scientific rigor in decoloniality (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010; Zapata 2018), it is necessary to move forward from empirical, observable and, possibly, quantifiable responses. One of these strategies may be to track the number of representatives differentiated by race, class, and gender who have assumed a political position since the rise of these political figures to date. Another may be the appropriation of local knowledge as occurred with *Vivir Sabroso* in Colombia. This reappropriation can transcend both the political and academic spheres because according to Martha Isabel Gómez Lee, 'Vivir sabroso can recover a future for the social sciences and humanities by locating an interdisciplinary field to land an understanding of cultural heterogeneity' (Gómez-Lee 2022, 2 with own emphasis).

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Asef Bayat in the book on globalization and the politics of the informal in the global south, asks about agency relations that occur in the global south. What political forms do marginalized urban groups propose? These two notions and other examples such as the political and epistemological rescue of the movements against the capitalist hydra, show the interest in recognizing the struggles and discourses that aspire to a transformation in real politics (Medellín and González 2013).

Conclusions

Decoloniality as a scientific research program is essential to continue questioning the existing paradigms in the social sciences, as well as the relationship between the invisibilization of certain knowledge groups and the emerging political representation. As seen in the development of the document, decoloniality questions the concealment of original knowledge, but also advances revised knowledge traditions in order to build understanding and representation of historically invisible groups.

The empirical-analytical tradition has occupied a hegemonic role in the production of scientific knowledge in the West for much of the 20th century. It has even come to be considered by many as the only valid way of doing science. However, critical contributions from other positions, such as those from the historical-hermeneutic tradition, as well as those from the philosophy of science of the Frankfurt School, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, among others, have positioned other ways of building knowledge in academia.

This does not mean that the assumptions and contributions of the empirical-analytical paradigm have to be abandoned. As seen, decoloniality as a research program has advanced various epistemological traditions and, if something characterizes it, is its critical view not only of the ways of doing science, but of the invisibilization of other non-Western knowledge. For this reason, it is desirable to readjust the assumptions of previous paradigms and even provide them with a higher degree of recognition of other knowledge (Harding 1996).

One of the most important critiques that can be made to classical epistemological traditions, as well as to decoloniality itself, has to do with who constructs knowledge and from where they produce knowledge. As with the representation of political figures, scientific practices have social effects from the axiological practice of the problems that concern them and this drags down the norms and values about what is scientific and what is not (Echeverría 2002).

For Quijano, following Mignolo, the alternative to stop the colonial process is clear 'the destruction of the coloniality of world power' (Quijano, 2014, p. 437). For this same author, epistemological decolonization has to use a reappropriation of the intercultural. Where does decolonial energy emerge and how is it manifested? Reappropriation must offer alternatives given that 'Current times ask for, demand, a decolonial thought that articulates genealogies wasted by the planet and offers other economic, political, social and subjective modalities' (Mignolo 2014, 45).

Decoloniality as a current is not exempt from criticism. Immersed in certain global structures that cross each social and political sphere of the development of local knowledge, it seems that it is too late to ask about our own epistemology. Furthermore, those of us who subscribe to the essay maintain that scientific knowledge is also fundamental for the heuristic advance of disciplines such as sociology or anthropology, as long as it has the possibility of recognition and visibility of all knowledge.

Although the political representation or the designation of racialized and generically differentiated people does not guarantee an immediate change in knowledge and the exercise of real politics typical of the civilizational system, it does aspire to overcome common sense in daily life with a selfless attitude to move on to processes of understanding and comprehension of all alternative forms of communication and representation. These forms do not necessarily have to be modern in the Habermasian sense, they can also start from other worldviews such as *Vivir sabroso*. This rescue must come from racialized subjects given that they are the ones who embody and experience the historical gaps of socioeconomic violation and scientific and political underrepresentation.

Following Zapata, all Latin American criticism of colonialism or colonial continuities would have ventured towards the

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decolonization of knowledge and powers. However, in the area of knowledge production, the people who produce knowledge are not Indigenous or Afro-descendant and, of course, they face a gap if the gender dimension is added. What Zapata calls 'racialization of knowledge' can be translated for this author into ignorance, omission or exclusion. Although the arrival of racialized people to these spaces does not guarantee Dusselian liberation, we maintain that it is a substantial advance in political exercise.

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About the author:

José Mario Suárez Martínez is a PhD candidate in Social Sciences from El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, holds a master's degree in Social and Political Studies from Icesi University, Colombia, and has a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He is a collaborator on the Humanizing Deportation project at UC Davis. His research areas are ethnic-racial studies, particularly Afro-Latin American studies from a sociological perspective.

Oliver Alexander Zamudio Pulido has a Bachelor's degree in History from the Autonomous University of Baja California and a Master's degree in Regional Development from El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Social Sciences program with a specialty in Regional Studies, also in El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. He has extensive teaching experience in Bachelor's and Master's level related to the social sciences and humanities. His academic interests revolve around the study of spatial and urban problems from an interdisciplinary and critical perspective.

Alessandro Biazzi Couto is a PhD candidate at Colegio de la Frontera Norte. He holds a bachelor's and master's degree in International Relations from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. Currently, he is a Professor of International Relations at the Federal Center for Technological Education Celso Suckow da Fonseca (CEFET-RJ) in Brazil. His expertise includes International Political Economy, the energy sector, regional integration in Latin America, and socio-environmental impacts, movements, and conflicts in the energy sector.