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# CRITICAL-EMANCIPATORY JOURNALISM AND MARXIST ETHICS:

the praxis of news against the order  
of capital



RAFAEL BELLAN RODRIGUES DE SOUZA

*Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo, Vitória – Espírito Santo – Brazil*

ORCID: 0000-0003-0165-2927

DOI: 10.25200/BJR.v20n1.2024.1611

Received in: March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2023

Desk Reviewed in: April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Desk Review Editor: Rogério Christofoletti

Revised on: January 01<sup>st</sup>, 2024

Approved on: January 04<sup>th</sup>, 2024

**ABSTRACT** – The article defends the need for approximation between Adelmo Genro Filho's proposal of critical-emancipatory journalism (2012) and the debates within Marxist ethics. Of a theoretical-conceptual nature, contributions are presented to, in the wake of the ontological foundations that support a Theory of Journalism, add to the necessarily collective, practical, and engaged development of news praxis. Ethical praxis as a guide for news praxis is, however, a confrontation and is only possible when taking a stand in the ongoing class struggle. This requires the return of the historical subject as an agent of the process of social metabolism, a mobilization that can count on the formative role of critical-emancipatory journalism, but which also depends on a broad renewed movement that places another form of collective life on the agenda.

**Key words:** Journalism theory. Ethic. Marxism.

## **JORNALISMO CRÍTICO-EMANCIPATÓRIO E ÉTICA MARXISTA: a práxis noticiosa contra a ordem do capital**

**RESUMO** – O artigo defende a necessidade de aproximação entre a proposta de jornalismo crítico-emancipatório de Adelmo Genro Filho (2012) e os debates no interior da ética marxista. De natureza teórico-conceitual, são apresentados aportes para, na esteira dos fundamentos ontológicos que sustentam uma Teoria do Jornalismo, contribuir para o desenvolvimento, necessariamente coletivo, prático e engajado, da práxis noticiosa. A práxis ética como guia da práxis noticiosa colocam-se, não obstante, como enfrentamento e só são possíveis ao se assumir um lugar na luta de classes em andamento. Isso exige o retorno do sujeito histórico como agente do processo de metabolismo social, mobilização que pode contar com o papel formador do jornalismo crítico-emancipatório, mas que depende também de um amplo movimento renovado que coloque na ordem do dia outra forma de vida coletiva.

**Palavras-chave:** Teoria do jornalismo. Ética. Marxismo.

## **PERIODISMO CRÍTICO-EMANCIPATORIO Y ÉTICA MARXISTA: la praxis informativa contra el orden del capital**

**RESUMEN** – El artículo defiende la necesidad de aproximación entre la propuesta de periodismo crítico-emancipador de Adelmo Genro Filho (2012) y los debates en el seno de la ética marxista. De carácter teórico-conceptual, se presentan aportes para a raíz de los fundamentos ontológicos que sustentan una Teoría del Periodismo, contribuir al desarrollo necesariamente colectivo, práctico y comprometido de la praxis informativa. La praxis ética como guía para la praxis noticiosa es, sin embargo, una confrontación y sólo es posible cuando toma un lugar en la lucha de clases en curso. Esto requiere el retorno del sujeto histórico como agente del proceso de metabolismo social, una movilización que puede contar con el papel formador del periodismo crítico-emancipador, pero que también depende de un amplio movimiento renovador que pone en juego otra forma de vida colectiva. la agenda.

**Palabras clave:** Teoría del periodismo. Principio moral. Marxismo.

### **1 Introduction**

The text aims to reflect on the essential approximation between the proposal of critical-emancipatory journalism inspired by the theory of Adelmo Genro Filho (2012) and the debates within the Marxist field on ethics, with special attention to Lukacsian formulations. Of a theoretical-conceptual nature, this article contributes to, in the wake of the ontological foundations that sustain a Theory of Journalism, the necessarily collective, practical, and engaged development of news praxis in times of crisis (Souza, 2018; Christofolletti, 2019), without ignoring that it is imbricated in the “universally manipulated condition of society in the era of highly developed capitalism” (Lukács, 2012, p. 84).

This reflection opens up the possibilities of thinking about and producing journalism of another kind, motivated by an emancipatory and anti-bourgeois ideology, “indispensable to the deepening of the relationship between the individual and the human race in the conditions of the future society” (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 11). In this sense, we recover the Marxist tradition to develop journalism in a critical sense, demonstrating how it can engage a journalism that takes a stand, in an activism that, unlike the argumentative political defense of a closed political position, aims at the singular aspects of reality a cartography capable of exposing the concrete situation of the class struggle.

The question about the relationship between historical materialism and investigations into journalism in Brazil has greater expression in the 1980s, with the works of Genro Filho (2012) and Marcondes Filho (2009). However, for Figueiredo (2020), this critical strand became peripheral in the 90s in the face of the hegemony of North American theories, with an emphasis on newsmaking. At the turn of the twenty-first century, however, there is a return to Marxism, especially in the dialogue with the so-called Political Economy of Communication (PEC), seeking to understand the world of work of journalists, but also the challenges of knowledge at a time of serious planetary crisis. “The PEC would be attentive to power relations involved in the production and consumption of symbolic goods, that is, issues pertinent to cultural work, concentration of media conglomerates, and hegemony” (Figueiredo, 2020, p. 108). Journalism gains an important space in this current, not least since, as Daros (2022) points out, the resources of the news media can also be analyzed as power relations that cross the production, distribution, and consumption of the news commodity.

The critical reading of the “factory floor” of news production, which presents in many studies the ideological contours of production, as well as the productive logic of the news commodity, are relevant since they unveil the gears of the press. Studies of the journalists’ work world, reflections on professional identity, and the grammar of journalists’ precariousness have revealed substantive determinations of the attacks on work in favor of capital. Recent research (which is based on Marxism) highlights studies on the market and business models, work processes and reporters’ profiles, coverage and its ideological contradictions, and the relationship between Marxism and journalism, which rescue concepts such as hegemony and praxis of

the Marxist tradition (Figueiredo, 2020). The examination of themes such as art and culture, indebted to the tradition of British cultural studies, in the wake of Williams (2011), is expressive, whereas the closer reading of Lukács (2012) and Gramsci (2004) has brought greater detail about the specificity of forms of knowledge and their challenges to the class struggle. In summary, research that deals with both the economic themes associated with Marxism (Martins, 2020; Brittos & Bolão, 2005; Dantas et al., 2022), the thought-provoking reflections on the communication-work binomial (Figaro, 2008), as well as the critical nuances of media hegemony (Moraes, 2016) and possible alternatives (Bastos, 2022) gain prominence in Brazil. A dialectical prism focused on the interpretation of journalism animates the works of Pontes (2015) and Moretzsohn (2007).

In the Lukacsian direction, we understand that the epistemological debate of journalism gains critical contours when supported by an ontology of social being, which envisions the existence and central categories of the being in life in society. As Marx and Engels (2007) explain, human beings produce their material reality by existing social relations. Thus, it would not be the consciousness of human beings that would determine their being, but their social being that would determine their consciousness. “The central thesis is that the work process, a model of praxis, establishes the subject/object relationship, founding teleology (the determination and prediction of the purpose, of the objectives, non-existent in nature), from which the alternative of freedom (a specific category and only pertinent to the social being) derives” (Netto, 2023, p. 77).

Persisting in the dimension of the ontological foundations of journalism calls us to circumvent the tendencies that seek to sediment particularist and utilitarian readings of the journalistic exercise, as well as the new (retreaded) tendency to subjectivism and relativism, which seeks to hypostatize in the affective experience of the reporter, or of the sources, an entification of spontaneous subjectivity (Moraes, 2022) as the only organ capable of explaining the human being and social reality. The theories linked to the theme of the “world of life”, of clear phenomenological inspiration (Ianni, 2003), draw an epistemological paradigm focused on subjective perceptions and experiences absorbed individually, most of the time ignoring or silencing themselves about the concrete historical causalities of the social contradictions produced within capitalist society<sup>1</sup>. These phenomenological theories assume the activism

and intentions of reporters but undo the specificity of the type of knowledge of journalism, that is, the ability to express the singular aspects of concrete reality.

Theoretical distortions of this type contribute to the expansion of irrationalist forms (Lukács, 2020) of news production. They show difficulty in understanding the “(...) specificity of man as a synthesis of the various levels of his objective and subjective existence, that is, of his biological, anthropological and, above all, historical (economic, cultural, political, ideological and ethical) nature (...)” (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 79). There is both an objective and subjective foundation in news praxis, “both concerning the content with which it works (social facts) and the form of apprehension and transformation of this content (the work of journalists in transforming social facts into journalistic facts)” (Pontes, 2015, p. 363).

Thus, the activist and militant perspective of journalists cannot be hypostatized in the understanding of journalism as a specific modality of knowledge but understood in its concrete dialectical and historical relationship with social reality and its objective dimensions. This does not mean entering into the outdated and neo-positivist (Lukács, 2012) affirmation of a neutral objectivity with its own legalities without intentionality, but rather the defense of subjectivity in its transformative power, after all, we make history, but in circumstances that we did not choose (Marx, 2011a). As Kosik (2002), one of the main influences of Genro Filho (2012), says, the human being reflects and projects reality at the same time, plans, anticipates, intervenes, is receptive and also active, a being of praxis, capable of objectifying himself and being the work of a collectively produced world. Since it is a dimension related to social praxis focused on the role of connecting singular individuals to their human-generic challenges, journalism requires a moral and ethical stance linked to this potentiality.

While acknowledging the importance of the referential guidelines from the crystallization of a set of concrete norms in professional deontology (such as the Code of Ethics of Brazilian Journalists), which, as in other categories, gains formal expression in statutory codes and principles, ethical reflection is directed to be a reflexive instrument on “the moral world as an object of axiological relations between individuals, groups, and societies” (Karam, 1997, p. 33). Ethics seeks, thus, to debate, problematize, investigate, and alter the meanings around moral values, providing the consciousness of

the subjects (in this case, linked to a praxis of knowledge production crystallized in the singular aspects of reality) with foundations that support decisions, leading and feeding the justifications so that the ethical responsibility of reporters is forwarded in a humanizing and emancipatory sense.

It seeks, then, to deepen the critical analysis of the moral action of journalists, which places the imperative of conscious intervention in the causalities from the system of social metabolism of capital (Mészáros, 2002), a necessary factor to reposition the “ontological and ideological assumptions that guide the production of news” (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 203). Deciding on a radical social change in hegemonic sociability requires knowledge about the processes that are underway in the metabolism of capital, that is, a more faithful understanding of the foundations of this order to know what to do, how to insert, by teleological means, new directions for the current trends.

The news praxis in a critical emancipatory prism demands an ethical praxis of another kind. Thus, knowledge, whether scientific or philosophical, that anchors ethics, cannot be seen only as a set of theoretical categories, but as forms and modes of existence, real abstractions that underpin human practice in its relationship with the generic being. The performance of journalistic activities, understood by Genro Filho (2012) as a news praxis, depends on ethical praxis as “a critique of the dominant morality and practice of the defense of emancipatory rights and values” (Barroco, 2010, p. 17). As a secondary teleological end (Lukács, 2013; Pontes, 2015), journalism depends on the prior ideation of a reading about reality and humanity.

Understood as a product elaborated to meet a historically constructed social need, the news is an objectification that spreads through everyday life, possessing real mediations between the singular report it carries and the human-generic dimensions of an open totality (Kosik, 2002). As Genro Filho (2012) and Karam (1997) point out, the universalizing content of journalism can expand knowledge and human freedom; singularity as the axis of knowledge provided by news praxis, when guided by another ideological angle, apprehends reality in a non-reified way.

Cementing journalism in its ontological connection places the requirement on researchers and others interested in this praxis to build “a dialectical relationship between the transitory historical aspect of the phenomenon and its historical-ontological dimension”

(Genro Filho, 2012, p. 23). In the case of ethics, as we will see in this text, the horizon in question is the connection between the actions of individuals with the demands from contemporary society and the human-generic attributes determined by it. This direction demands from journalists (and revolutionaries) an emancipatory ethic and a news praxis oriented toward social transformation. But before scrutinizing these categories, a brief cartography of the journalists' work world can help to understand the concrete soil of the challenges and obstacles of critical-emancipatory journalism in the current context.

## **2 Journalist workers**

The socio-metabolic system of capital (Mészáros, 2002) currently manifests a contingent appearance of platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2018), a nomenclature that has affinities with the notions of big data capitalism (Fuchs, 2019) and communicative capitalism (Dean, 2021), with an echo in the datafication and control complex, well documented by Zuboff (2021) in the popularized expression surveillance capitalism. However, capital must still be understood as an “economic engine and its associated irrational economic rationalities” (Harvey, 2016, p. 265) and its (informational) technologies become the territory of the platformization of work (Grohmann, 2020), a trend that also plagues journalism in the twenty-first century. It is becoming increasingly clear that information technologies, instead of assisting and dynamizing labor activity, as many technologists at the beginning of the century believed, have an applicability that intensifies the exploitation of labor since they increase the space for control and surveillance over the life span of reporters. “In contemporary capitalism, the whole of society is being robbed of resources and wealth extracted from science and technology, national cultural heritage, public and social rights, even genetic material and biological reproduction, by virtue of intellectual property rights” (Dantas et al., 2022, p. 14).

The journalist suffers the intense proletarianization that attacks the most intellectualized professions and makes up the expanded working class that expands worldwide, subjected to the capitalist mode of production entangled by informational machines and their algorithms aimed at the colonization of digital data (Lippold & Faustino, 2022). Professional journalistic activity has been absorbed by the informational structure of digital platforms, both in the sphere of production and

circulation. The management of the platforms over the journalistic complex is present in their control of the rules of the game since their mediation can enhance or ruin the distribution of materials, becoming a despotic infrastructure for communicative businesses. Journalistic organizations are reoriented, especially the control over work, changing the most rigid forms of assembly line to a super flexible engineering, which reorganizes working conditions and production routines.

Data revealed by the Brazilian Journalist Profile (Barros et al., 2023) show that the average income of 60% of journalists is less than 5,500 BRL per month and that health conditions have deteriorated in recent years. In addition, 24% of the workers have precarious employment contracts (without a formal contract or labor rights). With the labor and social security reform led in 2017 in the country (and never revoked), journalists suffer – alongside Brazilian workers – from the dismantling of public legal parameters that regulate labor relations. The most diverse territories of work end up “[...] potentially converted into generators of surplus value, from those who still maintain ties of formality and contractuality to those who are guided by open informality, on the integrated fringe of the system” (Antunes, 2018, p. 67).

The global labor crisis is particularized in the segment of information workers as a new form of global rationality that imprisons journalists in the neoliberal prescription that is typified by the mediation of platforms, an ethos closer to subordinate self-management (Abílio, 2019), a figure that resembles the so-called entrepreneur of oneself. Thus, success and failure become the responsibility of the subjects’ individual choices in an ideological falsification of the broader and more universal circumstances that determine their form of existence.

The valorization of the value of this production is the result of social, collective, complex, and combined work (Antunes, 2018). Thus, informality, flexibility, and precariousness are universal characteristics of the working class that affect the particularity of journalistic work. There is a de-specialization and flexibilization of activity in this digital scenario of financial capitalism platforms and the multitasking developed by journalists has shaken the deontological codes and know-how of conventional journalism. The ruptures with professional determinations, many of which are taught in training courses, also attest to the movement of capital in structural crisis (Mészáros, 2022), which presents structural unemployment and social barbarism as its clearest epiphenomena, in addition to



environmental corrosion, already delimited by some as a new era, in which capitalist activity developed by a type of social metabolism (second-order mediations<sup>2</sup>) puts human life on the globe at risk. It would be a kind of poly-crisis, a term that indicates that “(...) various crises: economic (inflation and slump); environmental (climate and pandemic); and geopolitical (war and international divisions) had come together” in the capitalist mode of production (Roberts, 2023).

### 3 News praxis

Journalism, understood as a social modality of knowledge crystallized in the singular aspects of reality, has a deep relationship with the forms created in the history of humanity to understand nature and itself. Unlike art (focused on the particular, expression of an anthropomorphizing knowledge of reality) and science (which aims at the universal, dealing with de-anthropomorphizing aspects of social objectivity) (Lukács, 2018), journalism emerges as a knowledge that mimics social facts, with a point of arrival in the social presentation of the singular (never disconnected from the broad totality to which it is a part, namely, the particular and the universal). Genro Filho (2012) argues, based on Marx (2011b), that knowledge goes from the abstract to the concrete, from the singular to the universal, and from form to content. The Marxist theorist from Rio Grande do Sul states that “(...) the story requires a form of knowledge that, to some extent, implies the revelation of its essence. That is, from the meaning that emanates from its relations with the totality of the economic, social, and political complex where it is situated” (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 46).

Journalism succeeds in achieving its goal of understanding the world when it advances beyond the reified appearance of facts and succeeds in investigating the connections between phenomenon and essence, exposing, always from the singular, the gears between events and human history in the process, with its material constraints and contradictions.

The comprehension of journalistic information from another ideological angle, that is, as an apprehension of a non-reified reality, recognizing its dialectical process and betting on its best possibilities, requires that the world be understood as a historical production in which subject and object are constructed and revealed. It requires a revolutionary perspective. (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 228).

In this way, the ontological and epistemological relevance of news praxis for humanity is demarcated, especially in this moment of deepening of a civilizational crisis, well documented in the serious contradictions (fundamental, changeable, and dangerous) perceived and detailed by Harvey (2016). For the subject who produces the news, a commitment is required “both with the ontological future of humanity and with the epistemological understanding of this process in form and content” (Karam, 1997, p. 49). This stance also implies a different reading of newsworthiness, since “news receives greater importance the more it is linked to events that signify the transformation of the historical conjuncture” (Pontes, 2015, p. 306).

One of the main criteria for the selection of news would then be the objective relations of the events with the concrete social totality. “So, if the singular is the raw material of journalism, the way in which the information it produces is crystallized, the criterion of the value of the news will depend, (contradictorily) on the universality it expresses. The singular, therefore, is the form of journalism and not its content” (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 80).

When news production can visualize connections that deepen the mere phenomenal everyday apprehension, escaping the ideological trap of the merely functional significance of direct social experience, it becomes critical news, capable of capturing facts beyond their automatic relationship with capitalist social reproduction. It is a praxis, a materially sedimented action, a tension between subjectivity and objectivity.

Praxis expresses the deepest synthesis of the relationship between man and the universe, insofar as it captures both diversity and unity, from an ontologically superior angle, that is, from the angle of the increasing appropriation of the natural world by human activity and thought (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 78).

Critical-emancipatory journalism would be one that does not get lost in the immediacy of reality, but investigates the most significant connections and mediations in the world, apprehending the possibilities embedded in the contradictions given in the historical context. A news praxis that seeks to “capture the relations between social phenomena inscribed in a totality in movement” (Bensaïd, 2013, p. 160). This type of knowledge depends on the active perspective of the journalist since it demands a positioning in the face of these possibilities.

On the one hand, under the private ownership of the media and the ideological hegemony of the bourgeoisie, journalism reinforces the dominant worldview. On the other hand, the apprehension and reproduction of journalistic facts may be based on the perspective of an opposing worldview and a revolutionary ideology. (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 222).

Understanding that the meanings of the world guide ideological practices and, thus, the ongoing conflicts in social reality, we see that journalism is part of the dispute of representations of the world, generating concrete effects on historical processualities. Linked to a certain conception of beings, ontological representations influence the social praxis of humanity and are related to power disputes. A Marxist critical direction for the reproduction of journalistic facts circulates the constellation of the ontological rejection of the capitalist mode of existence, since, without it, articulating figurations of the world capable of minimally shaking this order is impossible.

This becomes a historical potentiality when we understand that the journalist is part of the working class and, therefore, an active subject of the class struggle, even if he does not yet know it. Dean (2022) analyzes that the most relevant revolts of the last decade were an expression of the class struggle of the proletarianized of communicative capitalism. These, who would be the knowledge workers, producers of information in the circuit of digital exploitation, face the precarious situation of their lives by positioning themselves for the rebellion, even if diffuse, against the social structure. Being part of the movement of the working class, in its processes of struggle, is an imperative of transformations (objective and subjective) capable of enhancing the formulation of the necessary substantive changes. Hirst (2011) argues that the ideology of professionalism often prevents journalists from recognizing their own class location (as workers), and thus they lose sight of their real interests. Critical-emancipatory journalism is a news praxis that confronts these workers with their historical challenge against capitalist catastrophe.

In addition, the concrete analysis of the concrete situation (expressed by this journalism) allows moving the possible tactics within a strategy of overcoming the prevailing way of life. It is a type of journalism that brings the necessary singular expression of historical phenomena substantively situated in human praxis. Genro Filho (2012) demonstrates that the apprehension of the most immediate reality by a revolutionary perspective produces a singularity that moves away from the merely functional relationship with capitalist society.

Thus, critical news can provide a break from the conservative reading normally linked to the assembly of hegemonic common sense, hostage to a merely spontaneous signification of the social universe. This gains greater proportions with the advent of a digital territory that favors the circulation of “fake news” and rumors in its infoways, and that profits from the intensity of affects such as hatred and fear, which replaces the role of critical journalism as an emergency issue (Hirst, 2011).

In critical-emancipatory journalism, the ideological orientation pursues other figurations of the world (and other ethical values, as we will demonstrate below) that tend to be articulated by negating the order of production of the social metabolism of capital (an inherently racist and patriarchal system, we must note). Mészáros (2004) presents the notion that ideology would be the inevitable practical consciousness of class-based societies, carrying out processes of raising awareness of materially founded conflicts and directing them towards confrontation. The power of capitalist hegemony in the definition and hierarchization of ways of life is articulated with its ideological strategies and directs its worldview to sustain the mode of production of capital in the forms of knowledge.

Genro Filho (2012) brings up this point in his analysis of the ideological and ontological assumptions that guide the news praxis, criticizing the tendency of conventional journalism to express the immediacy that confirms the status quo. But by ontologically bringing the theme of concrete knowledge – which news production also carries as a power – the possibility of another possible and necessary journalism opens up. Journalism can then be guided by an emancipatory ideology that is directed towards changing the conditions of existence, “by which the structure of motivation necessary for the transformation of ‘every way of being’ of social individuals is defined and constantly redefined” (Mészáros, 2004, p. 329).

Linked to the historical present, this journalistic work of ascertaining and investigating the multiple determinations that define the facts as concrete follows the emancipatory ideological worldview and is also guided by a critical reason. The consciousness of reporters guided by emancipatory ideology can be guided by the dialectical interpretation of this present, seen in its open processualities of transformations.

The dialectical interpretation of history, of social reality seen in its historicity, implies possibilities of apprehension of the nexuses and movements, of the configurations and tensions with which social reality is formed, conformed, and transformed in its complexity, its dilemmas, and its horizons. (Ianni, 2003, p. 345).

This new but genuine social need creates the demand for an ethical stance to meet it. However, as much as there are specific decisions of journalistic practice, a reflection of morality that simply reduces its scope to rules of conduct would make ethics an idealistic discourse, incapable of guaranteeing the mediations, here and now, for the direction of teleological portions aimed at human emancipation. From the Marxist point of view, “ethics is a part, a moment of praxis as a whole” (Lukács, 2009, p. 72).

Similar to the examination of the role of the artist exposed by Albinati (2014), the reporter always positions himself in the face of reality, thus, the subjects’ self-understanding regarding their reality has an ethical dimension that supports it. Subjectivity and practical life show an inseparability, critical and emancipatory news would have the purpose of mobilizing both the reporter and his audience towards an elevation of the “whole man” to the “man wholly”. “A basis of Marxist ethics is the recognition that freedom consists in necessity made conscious. Intimately linked to this is the fact that men feel part of the human race” (Lukács, 2009, p. 75).

Journalism provides the individual with access to conjunctural historical material that presents him with the challenges of collective construction of possibilities, providing an understanding that maps possible choices. It is an activity clearly associated with morality since journalists’ choices can influence the decisions of social subjects. Thus, the focus on unmasking the interests of the agents and social power groups involved in the dynamics of the facts; the critical historical look at the essential internal causes of social processes, the attentive description of the territory of conflicts in parallel with the understanding of the particularities that encompass the singular events, inscribing the phenomena in a totality in movement, are elements that can direct the emancipatory critical enterprise of news praxis. The class struggle becomes the conscious direction of the cartography of the territory of conflicts, understanding the concrete as the result of multiple determinations that must be known for the confrontations that the subalterns need to face in their lives.

The subjectivity mobilized in the actions of reporters to materialize this form of appropriation of reality is crossed by ideological values and moral positions, which places the debate on the possibilities of Marxist ethics as an element that can contribute to contemporary news praxis in the context of generalized crisis. Following the Lukacsian impositions of Genro Filho (2012), who made

an important shift from the understanding of aesthetics to scrutinizing journalism, we understand the issue of morally oriented subjectivity and the dialectical mirroring that news praxis can provide as organically associated themes. As Hirst (2021) provocatively puts it, “journalists need to embrace their own subjectivity, but (...) they should do this by embracing materialism and dialectics – in short, journalists need to be Marxist thinkers to do their jobs properly” (p. 99).

Subjective ideological orientation and adherence to a political perspective define a way of reporting, it is an ideological and ontological presupposition that is related to an ethical commitment. But to this end, there is the challenge of the collective organization of these journalists, congregated with other workers, for the struggle (in the most diverse mediations) for the construction of another social engine beyond the capital. The control of production by journalists and also the trenches in the various spaces and gaps given in the private apparatuses of hegemony (especially the press itself) can be an important tactic in this path. Such resistance must also touch the structural foundations of the metabolism of capital, as well as confront the capitalist guidelines of digital platforms.

We are increasingly convinced that the necessary structural changes that can overcome the hegemony of capital need to take place from efforts outside digital platforms, in the organization of popular apparatuses of hegemony, in the critique of the logic of capital, which precedes and guides the functioning of platforms. (Bastos, 2022, p. 15).

To this end, the demand to forge a “personality that is capable of understanding itself as an active part of the process of constitution of the human world, perceiving it not as an inert matter that offers resistance, but as material to be shaped” (Albinati, 2014, p. 272) is highlighted. The self-construction of the social being finds in ethics an indispensable praxis for human emancipation.

#### **4 Ethical praxis**

Ivo Tonet (2007) points out how widespread the need for a just and humane world in our society is, but that the gap between proclaimed ethical values and objective reality is increasing. “We aspire to a just, solidary, and humane world, but it seems that these values are becoming more and more distant” (p. 47). The fear is due

to the current uncontrollable movement of capital to lead humanity more and more to social barbarism and corrosion of the affective life of humanity (Mészáros, 2002). This is due to the uncontrollability of capital finding in ideological irrationalism a destructive block that threatens human life as we know it every day.

While this is happening, the dissociation between moral norms and the given reality is widening, especially when progressive sectors believe that if we become aware of being “solidary, just, and peaceful, the world will *ipso facto* become solidary, just, and peaceful” (p. 52). Now, even if all capitalists were ethical, the extraction of surplus value would still occur (Marx, 2017), because they are personifications of the system. It is not, therefore, a moral problem, but one of the substances of metabolism that objectively delineates such behaviors. The mistake lies in the fact that in a capitalist society the individual “believes he is free because he does not see the social constraints that condition his thought and action” (Grespan, 2021, p. 85).

The centrality of capitalist sociability lies in the production of commodities and the reproduction of capital, when ethical principles make this material contradiction (capital/labor) invisible, falling back into transcendental and subjectivist forms, the proclaimed values walk on the opposite side of the concrete destructiveness tendency of the prevailing economic reason (Harvey, 2018). Tonet (2007) criticizes the perspective of humanization of capitalism, when social subjects act by disseminating moral values that are supposedly beneficial, but which do not carry out the ontological critique of the capitalist machinery. “Any discussion that ignores, fails to address, or does not admit that the logic of capital is the ontological foundation of this form of sociability, is a sterile, falsifying discussion that is doomed to failure” (Tonet, 2007, p. 57).

The so-called left-wing realists (Dean, 2022) also tend to diminish the social debate on the objective determinations of the order of capital. Giving priority to vague notions of democracy and citizenship, they turn to identity politics, which often give way to capitalist individualism. Just when solidarity and collective transformative force are so necessary, the figure of the entrepreneur in its various forms is ethically reinforced in neoliberal society. This retreated and re-semanticized bourgeois individual undergoes a construction commanded by capital. “Their fluid, hybrid, and mobile subjectivities appear as *loci* of freedom as if their singularity were a natural attribute and not, itself, an imposed, inscribed, and

technologically generated element at the service of capitalism” (Dean, 2022, p. 84). Without the perception of the dialectic that exists between economics, culture, and politics, between subjectivity and objectivity, without adequately understanding the concrete mediations between material life and symbolic production, left-wing realism (Dean, 2022) fails to point ways out of the catastrophe of capital in the twenty-first century.

Genro Filho (2012) also points to the failure of the notion of citizenship, imaginary, not real, which only manifests equality in the formal sphere, but ignores the substantive conditions of exploitation and oppression. This supposedly “humanizing” vision of capitalism is also associated with technological determinism, which sometimes believes that some reforms in the digital territory can solve the structural dilemmas designed in the society of capital.

For a very long time, we were expected to believe that all our problems would be happily solved by socially neutral “development” and “modernization”. Technology should overcome every conceivable obstacle and difficulty on its own. It was, at best, an illusion imposed on all who, in their desire to find a way out of their own active role in the decision-making process, held out the hope that great improvements in their conditions of existence would be realized in the promised way. They had to discover with bitter experience that the technological panacea was a self-advantageous subterfuge of contradictions on the part of those who wielded the helms of social control. (Mészáros, 2007, p. 189).

Any reference to a Marxist moral philosophy thus seems to relate to the starting point of the denial, on principle, of the order of social reproduction of capital, which also imposes the institution of a viable reproductive alternative in the long run, which replaces capital as an organic system of mediation with nature. Tonet (2007) questions the place of ethics in Marxism, pointing out that it will always be an abstraction, since even when critical, it anticipates values that have not yet been realized. However, he sees a huge difference between the ethical principles thought in continuity with capitalist society and those thought against such a set of mediations, supported by the working class.

Marxist ethics could then be seen as a praxis that points to another form of sociability, in which it can be realized. It becomes a struggle for overcoming the order, since it adds values aimed at the creation of new daily practices. It is when ethics pursues a totalizing knowledge and presents itself as a historical reflection that it can



be directed “to the critique of everyday morality, to the unveiling of moral alienation, the foundations and meaning of values, to the apprehension of the possibilities of concrete objectification of human-generic ethical demands” (Barroco, 2010, p. 83). The author believes that even in class society there is always room for actions of contestation and teleological poles capable of other moral objectification. Ethical praxis for her is then configured as “(...) critical reflection and theoretical systematization guided by socio-historical assumptions and directed to emancipatory values” (Barroco, 2010, p. 84).

This ethics is aware of its objective limits given by the system of social metabolism of capital and its second-order mediations (Mészáros, 2002), but it can contribute to the expansion of critical social consciousness, pointing to confronting the conditions of barbarism intensified in the twenty-first century and weaving strategies for creating a new societal project. Heller (2008) argues that moral change can only be consolidated within a transformative movement, which alters material reality while changing the collective subject of this revolution itself.

This ethics, mobilizing news praxis, can place the subject who produces the news object, but also its active audience, in the direction of a connection between its mere particularity and the universality of the human race, making them understand themselves as belonging to this sphere. It would be part of a general praxis aimed at the humanization of humanity itself.

The importance of Marxism for conducting these ethics capable of being a driving force for transformations can be mapped by its relevance in the face of the problems of the present.

The emergence of huge financial and industrial conglomerates, inverting the logic of nineteenth-century competition; the gradual process of replacing labor with increasingly sophisticated machines; the irradiation of the commodity form to almost all products and social relations; recurrent economic crises; the political sphere as a manifestation of social conflicts redistributive of property and income; the predominance of financial speculation over the creation of real wealth, with the consequent projection of all prices and expectations for an uncertain future: all these phenomena are perceived in germ by Marx's interpretation in works such as *Capital*. (Grespan, 2021, p. 10).

Sánchez Vazquez (2006) also argues that there is a space for reflection on morality and ethics in Marxism. He points out that

for this we need to understand it as a philosophy of praxis, whose main aspects would be the incessant criticism of the existing; as a societal project of human emancipation; as knowledge of reality and practical vocation in their inseparable articulation; and as a transformative practice. The idea that only “the awareness of the need to achieve certain ends or values, but also of the duty to contribute to achieving them, can drive to act, without expecting advantages or benefits, taking risks and sacrifices, in some extreme situations” (Sánchez Vazquez, 2006, p. 296). Marxist ethics as praxis cannot be realized without interfering in practice, it needs to express the “awareness of the movement that humanizes itself and humanizes humanity” (Heller, 2008, p. 157). Fundamental in Marxist ethics is the development of the emancipatory movement that takes it as a morality, for without it such principles become a sterile doctrine.

The realization of morality is not only an individual enterprise, but also a social one, that is, not only a process of moralization of the individual, but a process of moralization in which the various relationships, organizations, and social institutions influence in different ways. (Sánchez Vazquez, 2008, p. 233).

The material obstacles that confront journalists who are socially referenced and committed to emancipation are the division of labor, private property, the exploitation of surplus value, the estrangements that affect the world of work and distort social reproduction, and the ideologies that sustain order, guided by the need to guarantee the commodity “labor power” of the neoliberal subject, floating and flexible in the capitalist digital territory.

It is time for journalists to begin to understand their own contradictory class location and to discover that their real interests lie in the working class, not in their bourgeois paymasters. If you think about it, economically journalists are proletarians, they are wage workers, alienated and exploited. But ideologically, they have historically aligned themselves with the interests of the ruling class. (Hirst, 2021, p. 100).

Ethical praxis as a guide to news praxis is, however, a confrontation and is only possible when one assumes a place in the ongoing class struggle. On this point, we have to agree with Russell (2016) that journalism is in fact a practice structured in power struggles, but we point out that indignation and subjective emotions of passion for a cause cannot lose sight of the centrality of the capitalist gears of oppression and exploitation.

Therefore, truly combative journalism is associated with anti-capitalist currents, in movements and organizations that place the overcoming of the order of capital as a strategic horizon, providing it with a concrete reading of the concrete situation, expressing as knowledge a portrait of the present in its contradictions, signaling the steps to be taken, always avoiding trampling on the legality of social processes with their political positions. After all, the specificity of this very important and revolutionary form of knowledge lies in the openness and indeterminacy of the singular that, captured by journalism, manifests the self-production of historical subjects in a world in constant making.

## 5 Final considerations

It is understood from Genro Filho (2012) that journalism, as well as art and science, performs an important intellectual mediation for the individual and social subject, placing him as part of the human race, and enriching his daily life. The significant determinations of the singular apprehended in informative journalism become, for the thinker from Rio Grande do Sul, the conduit of a broad and meaningful life. This news praxis is not to be confused with the press, nor with the media matrices that guarantee its circulation.

Since it is a form of knowledge, journalism presents itself as an extremely current and important device for the historical subject's access "to the immediacy of the whole in which he is inserted" (Genro Filho, 2012, p. 232). News praxis spreads throughout society in different forms and arrangements and can be found in the construction of radical awareness about the need for structural changes and a concrete perspective of ethics. Hirst (2021) seems to re-edit Rosa Luxemburg's motto "socialism or barbarism", advocating a radical change in the understanding of the role of journalism in the scenario of expansion of irrationalism in the capitalist digital territory, saying that the direction toward an emancipatory critical perspective can rescue journalism from its crisis. "Good journalism needs to adopt a materialistic worldview to save itself from the dustbin of history" (Hirst, 2021, p. 99). The author also attests that the working class has not disappeared, an issue so well recorded by Antunes (2018), and that capitalism is still the predominant mode of production in the world, with the network society, information economy, etc. being

only its latest manifestation.

Hirst (2011) argues that the radical proposal to intensify workers' control over the newsroom and the news-making process can be an inescapable mediation of the process of struggle. A fully developed working-class journalism would arguably be an important driving force of social consciousness. After all, the public interest must be understood as synonymous with the collective interest of the global proletariat. Gramsci's (2004) integral journalism is also a good guide for the construction of this news praxis since it aims at the continuous construction of the militants' information needs.

The ethical praxis that guides this journalism can only materialize when it follows a totalizing ontological foundation – evidenced by Marxism. More than norms crystallized in codes, Marxism sees ethical principles as the guiding mechanism for transformative actions. This ethical praxis moves its efforts in the interest of “consciously articulating the non-antagonistic reproductive interchanges of a qualitatively different societal order as both the clearly identified objective or destination to be reached and the compass of the emancipatory journey undertaken already in and through the now unfolding historical process” (Mészáros, 2010, p. 428).

Bensaïd (2008) elucidates that, far from being utopian, emancipation is not a destiny inscribed in historical processualities. “The dialectic of emancipation is not an inevitable march towards a guaranteed end: popular aspirations and expectations are varied, contradictory, often divided between a demand for freedom and a demand for security” (p. 31). The function of politics in the Marxist sense is to articulate these hopes and to combine them in a historical future whose end is always uncertain.

Such a humanist project requires the return of the historical subject, the “new man” (Guevara, 2020) as an agent of the process of social metabolism, a mobilization that can count on the formative role of critical-emancipatory journalism, but which also depends on a broad renewed movement, which puts a new system of societal exchange on the agenda. To this end, the radical negation of the destructive social reproduction of capital is the maximum imperative that must guide the actions and equip the ethical principles of these militant reporters, in all possible spaces, widening the increasingly visible fissures of a social structure that shows more and more its signs of exhaustion.

## NOTES

- 1 Jodi Dean (2021) analyzes left-wing activism focused on the figure of the so-called “survivors” as an expression of the political incapacity of such a current. For her, they resort to their pain and trauma to ensure the survival of their identities. Progressive subjectivist journalism stands as a tool for the radical struggle against oppression, but without the class dimension, such individualization is aligned with progressive neoliberalism. Historical materialism has a long tradition of feminist and anti-racist studies, references unknown to the postmodern strand of activist advocacy in journalism. The works of Pinassi (2013), Vogel (2022), and Goldman (2014) are good entries for the Marxist feminist debate, well synthesized also in the manifesto of Arruzza et al. (2019). And on the fight against racism, see Damasceno (2022) and Moura (2014).
- 2 Mészáros (2002) defines second-order mediations as the capitalist means of production and their personifications, such as money, production for exchange, the bourgeois State, the market. They are mechanisms that subsume the essential productive activity of social beings and block full human emancipation, or rather, the reestablishment of the ontological link between man and nature, understood as a first-order mediation.

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**RAFAEL BELLAN RODRIGUES DE SOUZA.** He holds a PhD in Social Sciences from the São Paulo State University “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP), with a postdoctoral internship at the School of Communication and Arts of the University of São Paulo (USP). Adjunct professor of the Journalism course, permanent professor of the Graduate Program in Communication and Territorialities and researcher of the Graduate Program in Social Policy at the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES). Email: [rafaelbellan@yahoo.com.br](mailto:rafaelbellan@yahoo.com.br)

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